

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

March
2009

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

ACADEMY AWARD[®]
NOMINEE
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

“VISUAL KNOCKOUT

and an emotional grabber...
‘To make something special, you have to
believe it’s special,’ Po’s father tells him.
The filmmakers have that belief in spades.

— Glenn Whipp, *Los Angeles Daily News*



“It looks
FANTASTIC...

vast, moody, misty landscapes,
fanciful interiors and traditional Chinese colors
to give the movie an epic, expansive, ancient quality
that's a real pleasure to inhabit.”

– Carina Chocano, *Los Angeles Times*

Behold the Dragon Scroll...

It is yours. Legend says
you will be able to hear
a butterfly's wing beat.
And see light in the deepest cave.
You will feel the universe
in motion around you.



THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

March
2009

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE



Madagascar
Penguins
Join the
Nick Family

Through LAIKA's
Looking Glass:
Coraline Begins Her
Magical 3-D Journey

\$5.95 U.S.



www.animationmagazine.net



6 ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATIONS

INCLUDING

**BEST ANIMATED FEATURE • BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE • BEST ORIGINAL SONG "DOWN TO EARTH"**

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
ANDREW STANTON

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
ANDREW STANTON, JIM REARDON
ORIGINAL STORY BY ANDREW STANTON, PETE DOCTER

BEST SOUND MIXING
RE-RECORDING MIXERS TOM MYERS, MICHAEL SEMANICK
PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER BEN BURTT

BEST SOUND EDITING
SOUND AND CHARACTER VOICE DESIGNER/SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR BEN BURTT
SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR MATTHEW WOOD

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
THOMAS NEWMAN

BEST ORIGINAL SONG
"DOWN TO EARTH"
MUSIC BY PETER GABRIEL AND THOMAS NEWMAN
LYRICS BY PETER GABRIEL

Disney • PIXAR
WALL•E

DisneyStudiosAwards.com
©Disney/Pixar

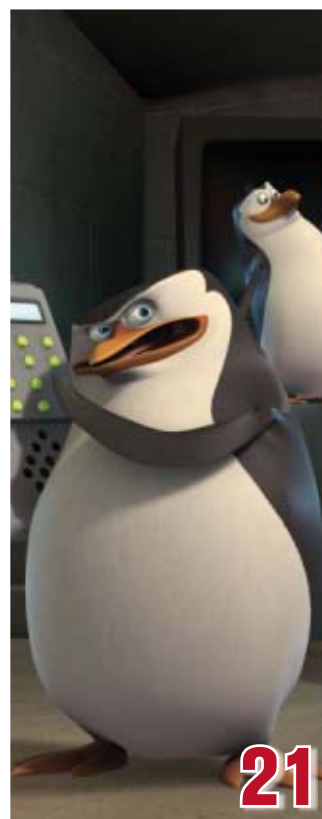
Volume 23, Issue 3, Number 192, March 2009

CONTENTS

WWW.ANIMATIONMAGAZINE.NET

8

13

18

21

Frame-by-Frame

4 March Animation Planner ...
Books We Love

Features

8 Mr. Selick's Other-Worldly Magic. How the brilliant Henry Selick and his team at LAIKA used 3-D stop motion to recreate the world of *Coraline*. [by Thomas J. McLean]

12 Cartoon Movie. The annual Euro event moves to France and delivers a very impressive lineup of animated features.

13 Magnificent Misfits. Adam Elliot's new stop-motion feature *Mary and Max* dazzles the picky audiences at Sundance.

Shorts

14 Shorts Race Emerges as Sublime Global Sampler. If you like your toons eclectic, rich in style and globally representative, this year's Oscar picks should make you very happy. [by Ellen Wolff]

Home Entertainment

18 An Amazon Princess Is Reborn. Director Lauren Montgomery and writer Michael Jelenic discuss the behind-the-scenes secrets of the new *Wonder Woman*.

Television

21 The Penguins Have Landed. Nickelodeon and DreamWorks bring *The Penguins of Madagascar* to the small screen. [by Mercedes Milligan]

24 Smash! Bang! Ka-Pow! *Team Smithereen*, Jetix Europe's colorful new hybrid series introduces a group of wild puppets who aren't afraid of getting blown up, smashed or set on fire. [by Ramin Zahed]

26 Action Mouse Is Ready to Roll. Toon Disney gets a new name (Disney XD) and is re-branded as a boy-focused destination.

VFX

30 Telekinesis to the Rescue. VFX master Kent Houston mixes subtle effects with superheroic elements in the new sci-fi thriller, *Push*. [by Ron Magid]

AniComm 09

32 The 2009 Anicomm Awards. Animag praises and honors the best animated, most original, funniest and all-around most brilliant commercials of the past year!

Cover: Director Henry Selick and the top-notch team at LAIKA bring Neil Gaiman's dark fairy tale, *Coraline*, to animated life.

Corrections: In the January issue, S4 Studios' co-founder Dale Hendrickson's name was misspelled.

In the February issue, Lincoln Butterfield producer Michael Lessa was erroneously identified as producer of *Heavy Metal*. He worked in the movie's animation department. He was a senior producer on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Angry Beavers* and *Hey Arnold!*

MAR•09

1



"Oh no! They can't do this to our favorite cat and mouse!" That was the cry heard all over the world last month when it was announced that Warner Bros. was making a CG/live-action hybrid movie based on Hanna Barbera's beloved Tom and Jerry characters. The trades reported that Warner Bros. exec producer Dan Lin, whose credits include *The Departed*, *10,000 B.C.* and the upcoming *Terminator: Salvation* and *Sherlock Holmes*, and relative newbie writer Eric Gravning will be tackling this risky project.

The movie takes us back to the early days of our warring friends and charts the birth of their long-lasting rivalry ... They also get lost in Chicago and have to team up to find their way back home. Along the way, we presume, they'll meet lots of fascinating, zany characters, have many wacky accidents and learn a few lessons, too!

You are not alone if you felt a big knot in your stomach after finding out about this piece of news. After all, we all know what happened to some of the other recent hybrid movies based on our wonderful 2D animated friends of the past. Remember the live-action adaptation of *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*? We wish we didn't! Did anyone really fall in love with the recent *Alvin and the Chipmunks* or *Scooby Doo* movies, despite all the bags of cash they made at the box office?

The point, however, is using new technologies to introduce these wonderful characters to new generations of moviegoers is a great idea, if and only if they also spend a good deal of time to develop a finely polished, witty and perhaps even touching script that befits the Hanna-Barbera legacy. After all, Tom and Jerry have been around for almost seven decades now, have won seven Oscars and survived numerous madcap misadventures and god-awful "re-imagined" TV series. We just hope that the folks in charge of this precious cargo will spend as much time with the character and story development as they do with showcasing the digital bells and whistles.

Not surprisingly, there's a lot more where that came from! We're expecting more big-screen adaptations of these 2D golden oldies in the next few years. Warner Bros. has announced new features based on Marvin the Martian, Yogi Bear, Mighty Mouse and The Smurfs are only a few of the other classics waiting in the wings for their

own 21st century re-vamp. Is it too much to hope for that those in charge of these hybrids will follow in the footsteps of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and not *Howard the Duck*? And one other request: Can someone please make sure Itchy and Scratchy get a cameo in the Tom and Jerry movie?



Marvin the Martian



Mighty Mouse

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

Quote of the Month

"We're lucky M. Night Shyamalan isn't directing a live-action movie based on *The Boondocks* ... otherwise he'd give the lead to the kid from *Two and a Half Men*."

—A recent posting on an *Avatar: The Last Airbender* fan site, commenting on the clueless director's racist decision to have white actors such as Jesse McCartney star in the movie adaptation of the popular Nick series.



ANIMATION MAGAZINE

March 2009

Vol. 23, Issue 3, No. 192
Info@animationmagazine.net

President Jean Thoren
Publisher Jodi Bluth
Accounting Jan Bayouth
Webmaster Eric Brandenburg

EDITORIAL Edit@animationmagazine.net
Editor-in-Chief Ramin Zahed
Web and Gaming Editor Ryan Ball
Contributing Editors Chris Grove, Ron Magid,
Barbara Robertson
Editorial Assistant Mercedes Milligan
Digital Reviews Editor Todd Sheridan Perry
Contributors
Mike Fisher, Tom McLean,
Charles Solomon, Ellen Wolff

ADVERTISING SALES

Sales@animationmagazine.net
Sheri Shelton

PRODUCTION Prod@animationmagazine.net
Art and Production Director Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION Circ@animationmagazine.net
Circulation Director Jan Bayouth
Circulation Administrator Alexis Beebe

TO ADVERTISE:
Phone: 818-991-2884
Fax: 818-991-3773
Email: Sales@animationmagazine.net
Website: www.animationmagazine.net

List Rental
Quantum List Marketing
480-860-6036
ANIMATION MAGAZINE
(USPS 015-877/ISSN 1041-617X)

Published monthly, except for combined issues of April/May,
June/July and Dec/Jan, by: Animation Magazine
30941 West Agoura Road, Suite 102
Westlake Village, CA 91361

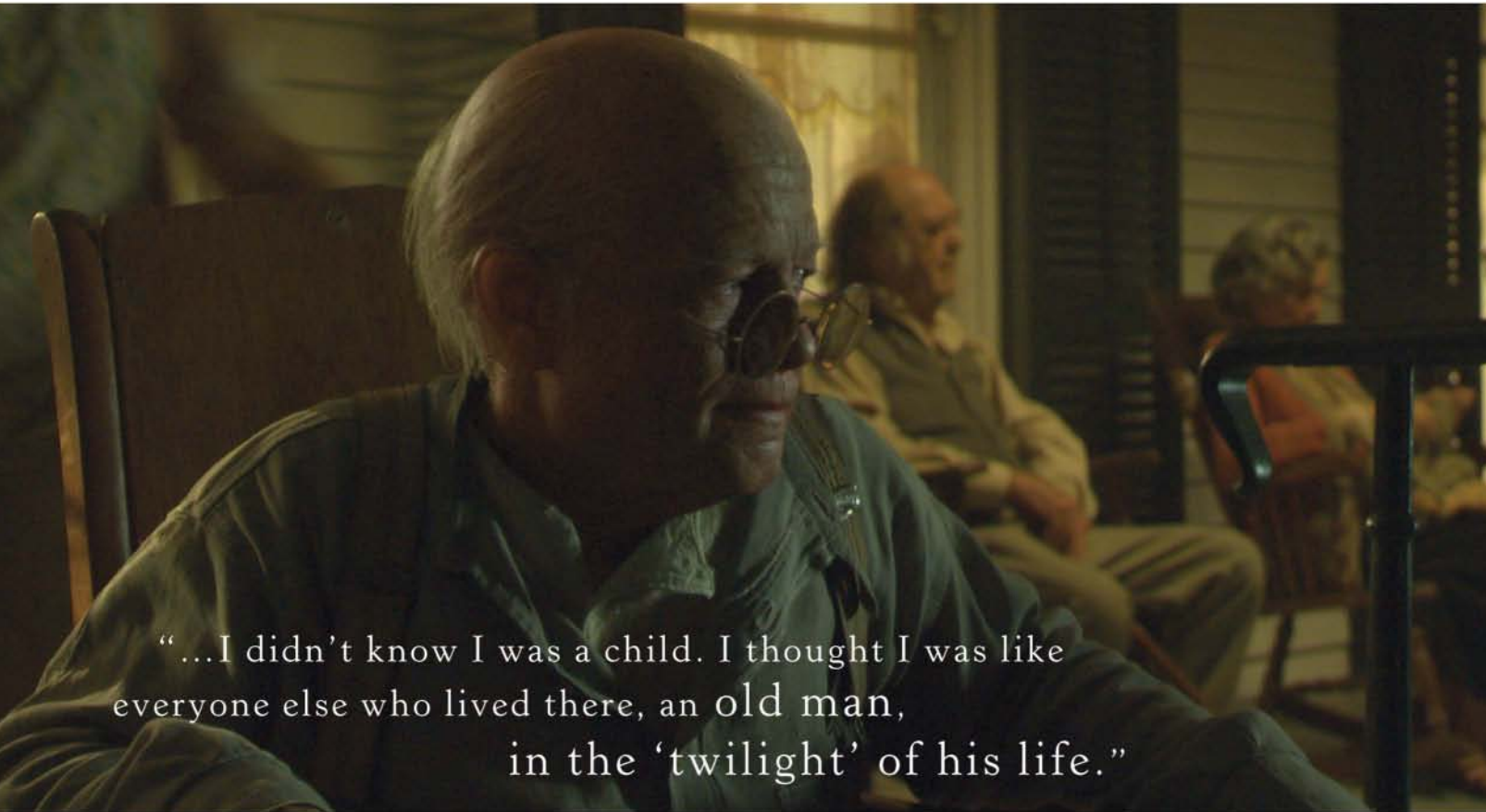
Periodicals postage paid at Thousand Oaks Post Office, CA,
and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER:
SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
ANIMATION MAGAZINE
30941 West Agoura Road, Suite 102
Westlake Village, CA 91361

TO SUBSCRIBE:
For the U.S., the rate is \$55 for 1 year or \$90 for 2 years. Rates for Canada and Mexico are US\$70 for 1 year or US\$115 for 2 years delivered by foreign airmail. Foreign rates are US\$85 for 1 year or US\$140 for 2 years delivered by foreign airmail. Please allow six to eight weeks for initial delivery. Also available in a digital version for \$36 for 1 year or \$60 for 2 years.

Animation Magazine
© 2009 Animation Magazine
Prior written approval must be obtained to duplicate any and all contents. The copyrights and trademarks of images featured herein are the property of their respective owners. Animation Magazine acknowledges the creators and copyright holders of the materials mentioned herein, and does not seek to infringe on those rights. Printed in the U.S.A.

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS



“...I didn’t know I was a child. I thought I was like everyone else who lived there, an old man, in the ‘twilight’ of his life.”

13 ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST PICTURE BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

The Curious Case Of
BENJAMIN BUTTON

11 BRITISH ACADEMY FILM AWARD NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST PICTURE BEST SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS

4 VISUAL EFFECTS SOCIETY
NOMINATIONS

OUTSTANDING VISUAL EFFECTS
IN A VISUAL EFFECTS DRIVEN MOTION PICTURE
BEST SINGLE VISUAL EFFECT OF THE YEAR

BENJAMIN'S SECRET

OUTSTANDING ANIMATED CHARACTER
IN A LIVE ACTION MOTION PICTURE

BENJAMIN BUTTON

OUTSTANDING COMPOSITING
IN A FEATURE MOTION PICTURE



© 2009 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved.

PARAMOUNTGUILDS.COM

The Animation Planner

March

3 Big day for animated DVDs today. Get in line to get your hands on *Wonder Woman 2009*, *Chowder Vol. 2*, *SpongeBob vs. the Big One*, *Mobile Suit Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket* and *Rick and Steve: The Complete Second Season*.



4-6 Learn about all the new Euro animated movies in development at the **Cartoon Movie** event, which takes place in Lyon, France (www.cartoon-media.be/MOVIE).



5-9 If you happen to be in Vienna, why not take in the fun **Tricky Women Animation Film Festival** (www.trickywomen.at)?



6 Directed by Zack Snyder, the long-awaited feature adaptation of *Watchmen* finally hits theaters today.



9-15 Lisbon, Portugal, may be a hot destination for lovers, but it's also the city hosting the annual **Monstra Animated Film Festival** this week (monstrafestival.com).

10 Everyone's favorite wooden toy comes to animated life once again in Disney's *Pinocchio* Platinum Edition DVD. Other choice cartoon titles for today include *South Park: 12th Season*, *Max Fleischer's Gulliver's Travels* and *Woody Woodpecker's Favorites*.



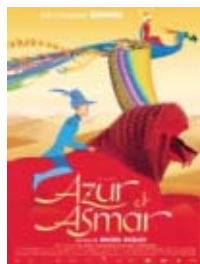
12-13 Find out what's new in the children's entertainment field at the two-day **Bra'nCamp** confab in New York City (www.braincamp.com).



13 Disney returns to its vaults for a new version of *Race to Witch Mountain*, starring Dwayne Johnson and Carla Gugino. Also opening today is *Knowing*, a *Twilight Zone*-ish thriller starring Nicolas Cage and Rose Byrne.



17 Get a double-dose of the animated pooch movies *All Dogs Go to Heaven 1 and 2* which arrives in a cool new DVD package. Also out today are *Zeta Project: Season 1*, *Bakugan, Vol. 3: Good Versus Evil*, *A Pup Named Scooby-Doo: Complete 2nd, 3rd & 4th Seasons*, *The Velveteen Rabbit* and Michel Ocelot's wonderful movie, *Azur and Asmar: The Princes' Quest*.



18-22 **Lucca Animation Festival** in Italy features tributes to Tex Avery, Estonian animators and some of the best shorts from around the world (www.luccanimation.com).



22 Disney's canine hero *Bolt* bounds onto Blu-ray today, with a standard DVD release on March 24.



23-27 Gain insider knowledge of the gaming business—and attend cool panels about *Spore*, *Saints Row 2*, *Braid* and *Gears of War 2*—at the annual **Game Developers Conference**, held at the Moscone Center in San Francisco (www.gdconf.com).



24 Why not celebrate the arrival of spring with the new *Lilo and Stitch* DVD re-issue? Also delivering mucho laughs today are *The Venture Bros.: 3rd Season* (on DVD and Blu-ray) and HBO's *The Life and Times of Tim: The Complete First Season*.



25-29 What's **Cortoons?** It's yet another global animation festival—but this one is in Rome, Italy, so you know the food is going to be fantastico, too! (www.cortoons.it)

27 The expectation level is quite high for DreamWorks Animation's first 3-D feature, *Monsters vs. Aliens*. Directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon, the fun pic features the voices of Reese Witherspoon and Stephen Colbert.



30 The annual **MIPTV** market kicks off today at the Palais de Festival in Cannes, France, and runs thru April 3 (www.miptv.com).



31 Baby boomers will get a big kick out of the new *Schoolhouse Rock! Earth* DVD arriving in stores today. Die-hard cartoon fans can also get their fix with *Negima!? Season 2, Part 2*, *Dragon Ball Z: Broly Triple Feature*, *Scooby-Doo and the Samurai Sword* and *The Real Ghostbusters Vol. 1*.



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

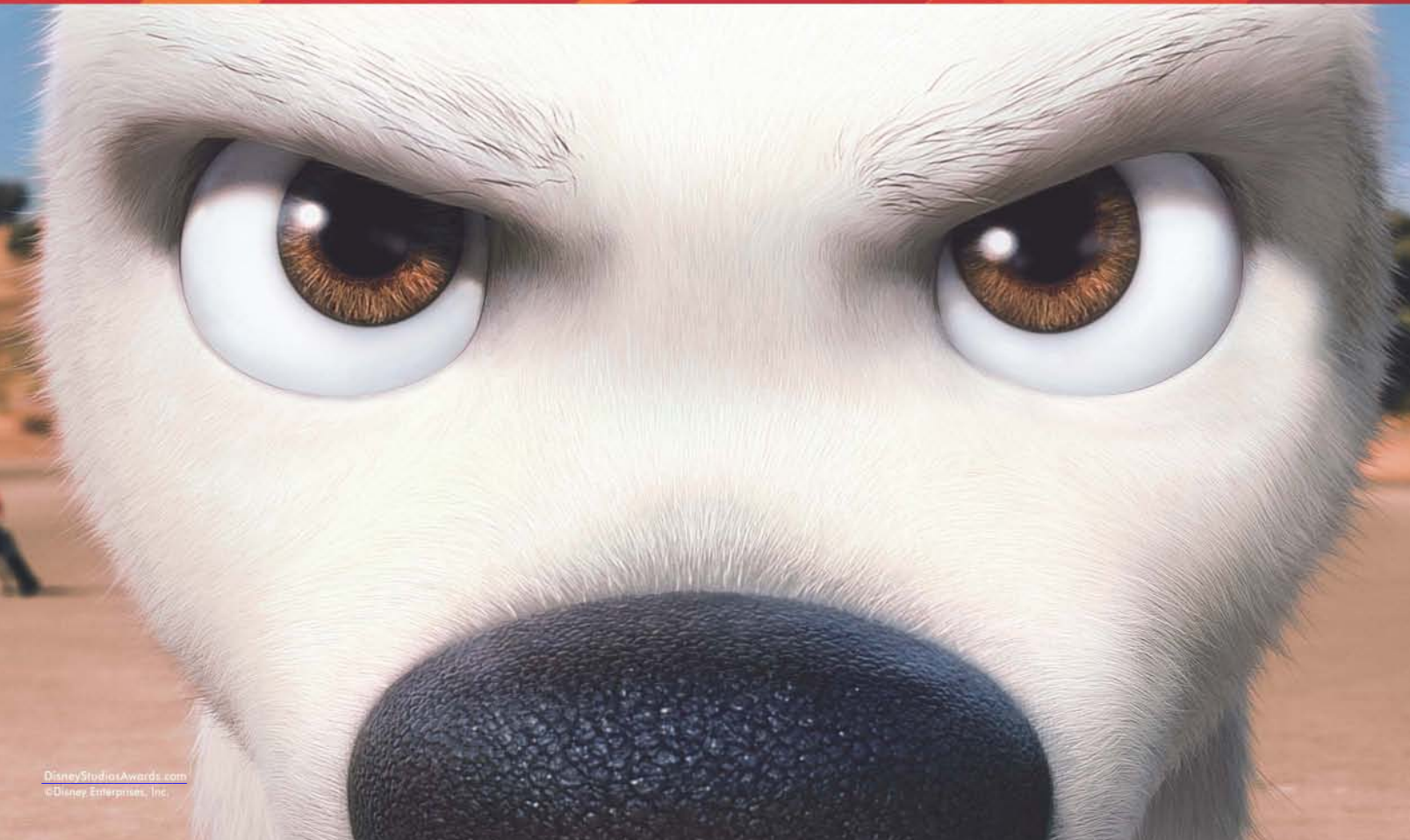
F O R Y O U R C O N S I D E R A T I O N

ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATION
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

CHRIS WILLIAMS AND BYRON HOWARD

"What keeps 'Bolt' fresh is an unaffected exuberance, a genuine sense of fun, that is expressed above all through obsessive attention to craft... 'Bolt,' in other words, is a real movie."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, A.O. Scott

WALT DISNEY
PICTURES
BOLT

DisneyStudiosAwards.com
©Disney Enterprises, Inc.

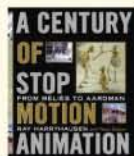
Books We Love



A Century of Stop-Motion Animation: From Méliès to Aardman

By Ray Harryhausen, Tony Dalton
(Watson-Guption, \$50)

Since we can see the most technologically advanced version of stop-motion animation on display in Henry Selick's 3-D feature *Coraline* this month, it might be a good time to brush up on your knowledge of the art form, which is as old as filmmaking itself. Our guides through this journey are special effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen, who is widely admired for his amazing achievements in stop motion (in classics such as *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans*), and art historian and writer Tony Dalton (*Ray Harryhausen: An Animated Life* and *The Art of Ray Harryhausen*). This richly illustrated book takes a look at the evolution of the art form through the master's eyes and takes us from the early creations of Georges Méliès and James Stuart Blackton to the works of Art Clokey and Rankin/Bass and the eccentric imaginings of Jan Švankmajer, Tim Burton and the Aardman gang. The book also includes a smorgasbord of previously unpublished photos and storyboards for un-produced projects. Once you enter this world of wonders, there's truly no turning back—not that anyone would really want to return to the blandness of the real world.



Coraline: A Visual Companion

By Stephen Jones
(William Morrow, \$34.99)

Once you finish Harryhausen's fantastic survey of the history of stop-motion, you'd be wise to pick up this wonderful tie-in book to *Coraline*, LAIKA Studio's adaptation of Neil Gaiman's dark fantasy. Stephen Jones, a London-based fantasy writer, has done an excellent job of interviewing Gaiman and the film's director Henry Selick as well as the rest of the film's cast and crew to paint a solid picture of the production of this landmark movie.



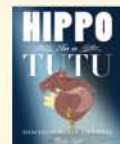
Of course, we really love these visual companions for their wealth of well-produced images, sketches and behind-the-scenes insights and revelations, and this one certainly doesn't disappoint. We just wish the book came with its own set of 3-D glasses and images.

Hippo in a Tutu: Dancing in Disney Animation

By Mindy Aloff
(Disney Editions, \$30)

For many animation fans, their first introduction to the world of dance is that famous sequence in Disney's *Fantasia* in which the elegant, overweight hippo ballerinas, crocodiles, ostriches and elephants perform memorably to Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours." Mindy Aloff includes this famous scene in her informative ride through the marriage between animation and dance—or, as John Canemaker writes in his intro to the book, "a pas de deux choreographed in heaven." It's great fun to turn the pages and see fine examples of this union, from *The Skeleton Dance* (1929) and Mickey Mouse's dance with inanimate objects in the 1936 short *Thru the Mirror* (1936), to Donald Duck's South American moves in *Saludos Amigos* (1943), to more recent examples such as Ariel's underwater routines in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and Lilo & Stitch's hula number. Along the way, Aloff takes her time to look at how Disney artists incorporated real world inspirations in their drawings and how the animated classics influenced the work of choreographers such as Mark Morris in the 20th century and beyond. Ward Kimball's drawings of the frolicking crows for *Dumbo* and a Lee Blair story sketch of Hyacinth Hippo and Ben Ali Gator doing the arabesque in "Dance of the Hours" are among the many precious extras we get in this book. The author even gives us a handy index of all the dance-related shorts and movies that the studio has released through its history. It's only February, but we don't think it's too early to pick this handsome volume as one of the best books of 2009!

—by Ramin Zahed



Pasozebra Productions

Our Studio is specialized in 3D animation

www.pasozebra.com

Pasozebra Productions S.L.
C/Grabador Enguidanos, 50
46015- VALENCIA (Spain)
Telf/Fax: 0034-963263172
Telf: 0034-963492009
info@pasozebra.com

In Pasozebra we do all types of 3D animation for Cinema and TV: Series, Adverts, Opening Sequences, Special Effects, Credits, TV Specials and Creation of Characters for brands

JOIN OUR TEAM!!
Please submit your Reel to:
rrhh@pasozebra.com



CARTOONS ON THE BAY

PULCINELLA AWARDS 2009

International Television and Multimedia Animation Festival
Rapallo, S.Margherita Ligure and Portofino, 2 - 5 April 2009, 13th edition



VIDEOGAMES

CARTOONS

COMICS

MULTIMEDIA

Mr. Selick's Other-Worldly Magic

How the brilliant Henry Selick and his team at LAIKA used 3-D stop-motion to recreate the world of *Coraline*.
by Thomas J. McLean



In Neil Gaiman's popular novella *Coraline*, a young girl discovers an Other World in which her parents grant her every wish and pay her all the attention she feels is missing in her real life. And director Henry Selick has high hopes that his movie version of *Coraline* will garner a similar reaction in the real world when Focus Features opens the 3-D, stop-motion animated movie February 6.

Despite the new twist that 3-D brings to the stop-motion process, Selick—best known as the director of the 1993 Tim Burton-produced holiday classic *The Nightmare Before Christmas*—says the story of *Coraline* is ideally suited to animation in general and stop-motion in particular.

"I felt in one sense it softened some of the horror elements. It gave the appearance of sweetening things when in fact it's actually a

stronger, bolder way to show the scary stuff," says the director, who considered both live action and CG animation for the film. "In live action, I think it'd be really difficult to pull this off and get a PG rating, which is what I was set on doing, and it's what we've gotten. It definitely, I think, would have crossed the line."

Making the film has been a long process for Selick that began when he read an unfinished draft of Gaiman's

novella. "It had a strong universal appeal, even if it was strange or creepy or unusual; the appeal being that everyone dreams of getting rid of their parents when you're a kid," he says.

The book was published in 2002, and won a large readership and a slew of honors, including Hugo, Nebula and Bram Stoker awards for best novella. Former Disney and Fox executive Bill Mechanic acquired the film rights and put Selick to work on adapting the story—a journey that had more than its share of road bumps. Selick says it took a while before he was comfortable enough with the story and the characters to change Gaiman's story into something that worked as a movie.

"The most effective tool for me was not to use any dialogue and try to figure out, what's the story? If no one talked, what are the images?"





Magical, Mystical Ride: Director Henry Selick used the new stereoscopic dual digital camera rig on *Coraline* and points out that the new technology gives the filmmaker a better sense of reality in the medium "It doesn't live in the computer, nor is it a series of drawings: It's an actual set and puppets," he explains.



"The most effective tool for me was not to use any dialogue and try to figure out, what's the story? If no one talked, what are the images? That was sort of a breakthrough for me. I would do my own sketches, I would write descriptions beyond what Neil might have about the house where they lived ... I was able to go deeper in creating the entire world, even if I was only going to use a portion of that, just so I felt that I'd made the characters my own."

—*Coraline* director Henry Selick

he says. "That was sort of a breakthrough for me. I would do my own sketches, I would write descriptions beyond what Neil might have about the house where they lived ... I was able to go deeper in creating the entire world, even if I was only going to use a portion of that, just so I felt that I'd made the characters my own."

Along the way, Selick made some changes to the story, most notably the

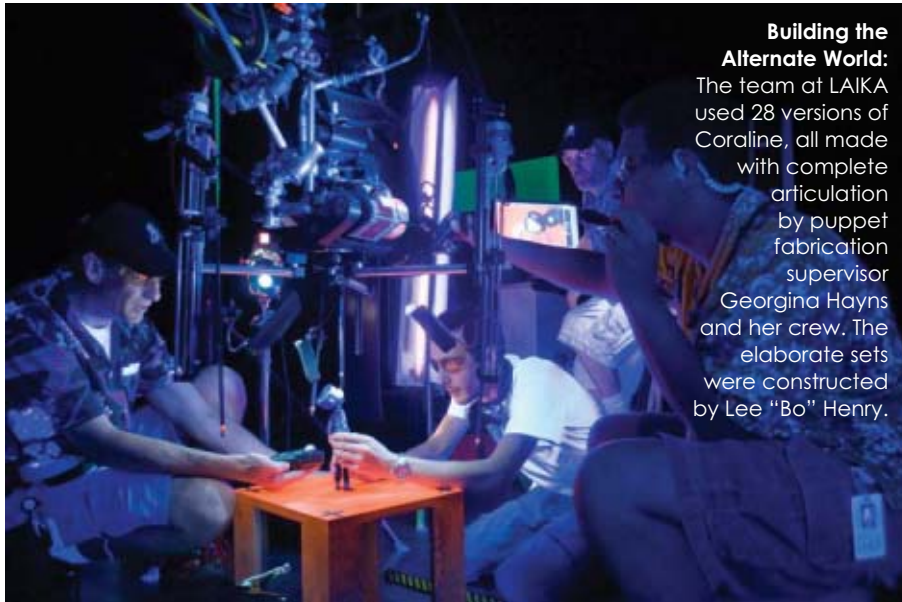
addition of a new character, Wybie, a local boy who befriends Coraline, and a stylishly menacing visual transformation for the Other Mother as her conflict with Coraline grows.

Getting the film ready to shoot moved on from the script stage to a two-year pre-production phase in which the movie was fully storyboarded and further refined.

"In sketching out every shot of the

movie, you always find a better way," he says. That leads to many revisions of the story, with some sequences going through as many as 30 iterations before reaching their final form. "Some of the scarier things we've done at least 10 versions, 15 versions. There's nothing in the film that wasn't redrawn at least eight to 10 times," Selick says.

Selick recruited a voice cast of top talent, with Dakota Fanning playing



Building the Alternate World:

The team at LAIKA used 28 versions of Coraline, all made with complete articulation by puppet fabrication supervisor Georgina Hayns and her crew. The elaborate sets were constructed by Lee "Bo" Henry.

Conceptual drawings helped to set the spooky mood for both worlds.

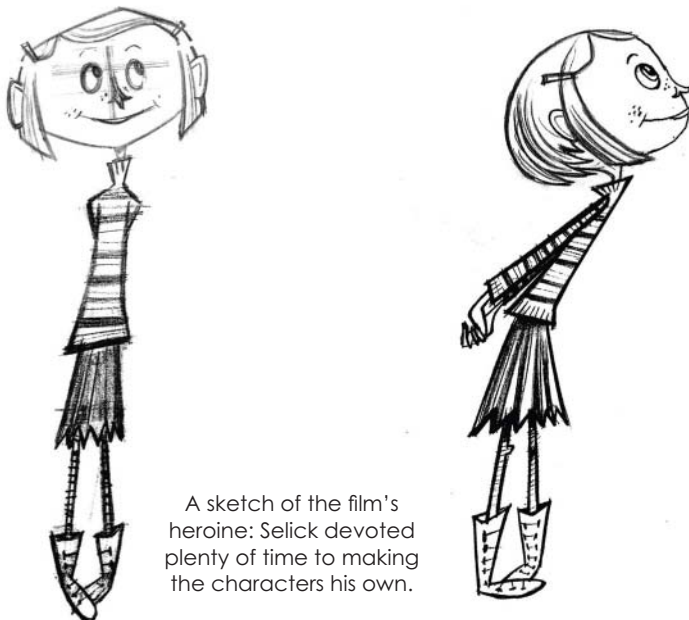


Coraline, Teri Hatcher as Mother and Other Mother, John Hodgman as Father and Other Father, Keith David as The Cat, Ian McShane as upstairs neighbor Bobinsky, Robert Bailey Jr. as Wybie and the English comedy duo of

Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders as the theatrically minded Miss Spink and Miss Forcible.

Production began in early 2007 at LAIKA's nondescript facility in an industrial park on the outskirts of Portland, Oregon. With every element of the film needing to be manufactured from scratch, Selick relied on a team of professionals, many of whom have worked with him for more than 20 years. Each main character required multiple puppets—there were 28 versions of Coraline herself—all made with complete articulation by puppet fabrication supervisor Georgina Hayns and her crew. Each puppet had to be built from scratch and took a crew of 10 people between three to four months to complete. Set construction was supervised by Lee "Bo" Henry, while Deborah Cook oversaw costumes and Susan Multon handled hair.

narrow head, eyes close



A sketch of the film's heroine: Selick devoted plenty of time to making the characters his own.

A team of 28 animators worked at any one time, rehearsing or shooting scenes, and producing a total of about 90 to 100 seconds of finished animation per week through 20 months of principal photography.

Despite the intense planning required to make the film, Selick says the process remains open to improvisation. The film was shot generally in chronological order so that the final act in particular can be adjusted. "It remains fluid to the very last possible second."

The most dramatic impact on production was the addition of 3-D. "Shooting 3-D was going to be a way to show off the strengths of stop motion, but it also was going to be appropriate for the story in that it's about discovering a better version of your life," says Selick.

To create true stereoscopic 3-D, *Coraline* was shot with a digital camera that for each exposure would shoot first one eye, then adjust the appropriate distance via a small model mover, and expose the frame again for the second eye.

While the technical elements were mostly worked out prior to shooting, figuring out how far you could go with the 3-D effect was a trial and error process. "It took us months to learn that something was going to look awful in 3-D. A lot of our theories proved wrong," says Selick.

Now completed, *Coraline* is carrying the banner for stop-motion features as the studios clamor after the box office and critical success that CGI animation has earned in recent years. But Selick, who says he thinks *Coraline* could only ever have been made as an independent film, points to the enduring success of *Nightmare* as proof that stop-motion can have a long and profitable lifespan.

"I think stop-motion may have a lot more timeless quality than a lot of CG films," he says. "We can also do these for substantially less ... I'm very hopeful about the future, but it's a film at a time, and we have to see what happens with *Coraline*." ■

Focus Features releases *Coraline* in U.S. theaters on February 6.

WWW.ANNECY.ORG

FESTIVAL
8-13 JUNE

MIFA
10-12 JUNE

ANNECY09

INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FILM FESTIVAL

BE AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

6 700	1 131	330	180	63	300
PARTICIPANTS	COMPANIES	EXHIBITORS	BUYERS	COUNTRIES	JOURNALISTS

That Certain European Flair

The crème de la crème of the animation community gets together in Lyons, France, this month for another eclectic edition of Cartoon Movie.

A decidedly grown-up, CG-animated movie about a love triangle between a beer-loving goat, his master and his girlfriend; a hilarious outing featuring a disco-dancing worm and a beautifully animated adventure inspired by Irish history are some of the bold and original projects scheduled to unspool at the 11th edition of

Cartoon Movie (March 4-6). That's the beauty of this Euro-centric event, which will showcase feature-length toons from 16 different countries this year. As Forrest Gump used to say, "You never know what you're gonna get!"

In previous years, Cartoon Movie took place in the German town of Babelsberg, near Berlin. However, this year, the

Ready to Roll

The following seven films will be presented in their entirety at the event:

Brendan and the Secret of Kells. Directed by Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey and produced by Irish studio Cartoon Saloon (*Skunk Fu!*), this beautifully designed and animated epic follows its 12-year-old hero on a thrilling adventure involving the ninth century illuminated manuscript. (Cartoon Saloon, Vivi Film, Les Armateurs)



Goat Story—The Old Prague Legends. Talented Czech newcomer Jan Tománek marries his country's classic animation traditions with a crisp CG style in this offbeat tale involving a young man, his girlfriend, his lovesick, beer-guzzling goat—and the devil. (Art and Animation Studio)



Jasper: Journey to the End of the World. Two adventurous penguin brothers retrieve the eggs of an endangered parrot from an evil doctor in this ecologically minded family outing, directed by Eckart Fingberg and Kay Delventhal. (Toons'n'Tales, Dacodac Studio, Amuse Films)

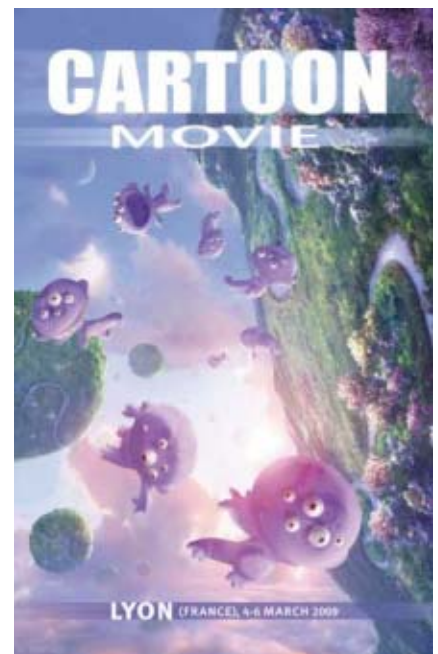
Mia and the Migoo. We hear great things about French auteur Jacques-Rémy Girel's (*Prophecy of the Frogs*) lovingly animated feature about a young girl's encounter with an unusual beast. The toon addresses grown-up issues such as mistreatment of workers, the destructive power of greed and our responsibility to protect the planet. (Folimage)



Sunshine Barry and the Disco Worms. Directed by Thomas Borch Nielsen, this hilarious Danish entry had everyone in stitches in previous editions of Cartoon Movie. Now it's finally wrapped and ready for the enjoyment of the masses! (Crone Film Prod., Disco Ormene/Sola Media)

The Missing Lynx. The protection of Spain's endangered flora and fauna is also on the mind of director Raul Garcia in this great-looking CG feature, produced by none other than actor Antonio Banderas. (Kandor Graphics, Perro Verde, Green Moon)

Journey to Saturn. When a crew of Danish misfits arrives on Saturn, they discover that the planet has already been colonized in this laugh riot produced by the talented Karsten Killeich (*Terkel in Trouble*, *Ugly Duckling and Me*). (A.Film)



show has moved to Lyons in France, perhaps to accentuate the growing role the animation industry is playing in that country. French animation studios such as Folimage, Les Armateurs, Gaumont and Millimages are producing or co-producing 26 films at the event. The city of Lyons is located in the Rhône-Alpes region of France—which is a spot rich with animation and visual effects studios and schools. The Annecy Market and Festival, Folimage, Project Images Films, Gebeka Films, La Poudrière, L'Équipée and the Emile Cohl School are a few of the region's toon-related organizations and companies.

Following right behind France are Germany and Belgium, which each have six projects in the works, with Spain and Denmark next in line with four pics each. Overall, the producers and the financiers of 49 projects will be attending—bringing the total budget number for the movies close to 312 million euros.

It's been 10 years since the first edition of Cartoon Movie took off in Germany, funded by the MEDIA Program of the European Union. Each year, producers, creative teams, investors and distributors meet, present and discuss their projects in various stages of development and production. The animation landscape in the continent has changed a lot over this important decade—and because of this unique event, 123 European-produced animated features have evolved from initial stages of development to the theatrical or DVD release stage. ■

For more info, visit
www.cartoon-media.eu.



Magnificent Misfits

Adam Elliot's new stop-motion feature *Mary and Max* was the toast of Sundance last month. Let's hope this very original Aussie effort gets picked up by a distributor real soon!

A stop-motion feature about a curious pen-pal relationship between a melancholic, shy eight-year-old girl in Melbourne and an overweight 44-year-old Jewish guy (voiced by Philip Seymour Hoffman) in New York made history last month. Aussie animator Adam Elliot, who nabbed an Oscar for his 23-minute short *Harvie Krumpet* in 2004, was able to land his latest movie *Mary and Max* in the primo spot of the Sundance Film Festival's opening night premiere. This marked the first time in the prestigious festival's history

during sex!"

He added, "Every single prop, set and character, you can hold in your hand. There was a temptation to do CGI rain, but the rain is fishing line. The fire is red cellophane. For all the water in the film we used over 50 tubes of sexual lubricant."

The movie's plot unfolds as Mary (voiced by Bethany Whitmore, and later by Toni Collette) finds Max's name out of an international address book at a post office and decides to write him a letter out of the blue! So begins a

"I try and make my characters as real as possible, and so, naturally, I present their journeys as a mix of comedy and tragedy; humor and pathos. All our lives are full of contradictions and absurdity from one time or another. Why should my little blobs of plasticine be any different?"

—Oscar-winning director Adam Elliot

that a feature-length animated film was selected as its opening night presentation.

"After winning the Oscar for *Harvie Krumpet*, somebody said to me, 'It's all downhill from here,'" said Elliott at Sundance. "I managed to come up with an idea, but I really underestimated how difficult it was going to be to make this film." He told the captivated audience that he and his six animators shot the movie by traditional claymation standards—creating 30 seconds per day between them over the arduous 57-week shoot. He also said it was like "being stabbed to death

strange, awkward and utterly captivating correspondence that lasts 20 odd years. "Elliot's claymated ensemble suggest the love children of Raold Dahl and Todd Solondz," comments L.A. Weekly's Scott Foundas. "Pixar this most certainly isn't. *Mary and Max* is as insular and private as any live-action 'personal film-making,'" he adds.

It's not too hard to believe that Elliot based the movie loosely on his own long-time pen-pal friendship with a New York man with Asperger's Syndrome. Through this eccentric movie, he dares to touch upon the nature of

friendship, obesity, autism, taxidermy, psychiatry, pain, suffering, alcoholism, kleptomania, humping dogs, agoraphobia and—something that been on Mary's mind—where babies come from!



Adam Elliot

When asked about his methods in a *Screen Australia* interview a few years back, Elliot said, "I have drawn, as far back as I can remember, and fall into some sort of satisfying meditative bliss when I doodle and scribble my wobbly pictures onto a page. My little plasticine blobby characters are an extension of this and it is a thrill to watch them 'come alive' through the magic of cinema."

The talented 36-year-old, who grew up on a shrimp farm in Southern Australia, said he never runs out of ideas because he keeps detailed notebooks, filled with observations on human behavior. "I never obsess with plot and start with the detail and work backwards," he said. "I know what ingredients I want in my films and then find a way to string them all together into potent and vivid vignettes."

Finally, for those who are wondering why



he chooses such odd, eccentric and uniquely human characters to showcase in his animated projects, he explains, "I try and make my characters as real as possible, and so, naturally, I present their journeys as a mix of comedy and tragedy; humor and pathos. All our lives are full of contradictions and absurdity from one time or another. Why should my little blobs of plasticine be any different?" ■

To find out more about Adam Elliot and his latest pièce de résistance, go to www.maryandmax.com.



Vancouver Film School alumni credits include **Across the Universe** Geeta Basantani, Digital Composer **Alias** Scott Dewis, Visual Effects Artist **Ant Bully** Ben Sanders, Character Animator | Rani Naamani, Animator | Ernesto Bottger, Character Animator **AVP: Alien vs. Predator** Shawn Walsh, Color & Lighting Technical Director **Babel** Luis Blackaller, Storyboard Artist | Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Supervisor **Battlestar Galactica** Daniel Osaki, Lead Modeler | Megan Majewski, 3D Animator | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Blizzard Entertainment** Alvaro Buendia, Cinematic Artist **Bolt** Lino Di Salvo, Supervising Animator/Voice of Vinnie **Charlotte's Web** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Adam Yaniv, Character Animator | Tony Etienne, Lead Lighter | Kristin Sedore, Lighter **Chicago** Lon Molnar, Animation Supervisor **The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** Kristin Sedore, Lighter | Shawn Walsh, Lighter | Adam Yaniv, Character Animator **The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian** Andreas Hikel, Pre-Visualization Artist | Christoph Schinko, Character Animator | Jami Gigot, Senior Layout Artist **Cloverfield** Nicholas Markel, Pre-Visualization Supervisor **Constantine** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **The Dark Knight** Pietro Ponti, Lead CG Lighting Artist **Dead Like Me** Daniel Osaki, Visual Effects Artist | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Diablo III** Alvaro Buendia, Cinematic Artist | Steven Chen, Cinematic Artist **Family Guy** Michael Loya, Storyboard Artist **Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer** Arun Ram-Mohan, Lighting Technical Director | Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | Jessica Alcorn, Composer **Flags of our Fathers** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Gears of War (VG)** Scott Dossett, Animator **The Godfather (VG)** Kirk Chantraine, Motion Capture Specialist **The Golden Compass** Adam Yaniv, Animator | Chad Moffitt, Animator | Thom Roberts, Animator | Ben Sanders, Animator | Andrew Lawson, Animator | Matthias Lowry, Visual Effects | Tony Etienne, Look Development | Justin Hammond, Lighter | Pearl Hsu, Effects Technical Director | Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Fion Mok, Matchmove Artist **Hairspray** Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Production Executive **Halo 3** Bartek Kujbida, Character Animator **Happy Feet** Ben Sanders, Character Animator | Thom Roberts, Character Animator **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** Shawn Walsh, Color & Lighting Technical Director **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** Pietro Ponti, Technical Director **Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince** Harry Mukhopadhyay, Lead Effects Technical Director **Hellboy** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Hellboy II: The Golden Army** Christoph Ammann, 3D Sequence Supervisor Technical Director | Brent Wong, Modeler **Hulk** Geoff Osaki, CGI Modeler | Megan Majewski, Pre-Visualization Animator | Arun Ram-Mohan, Lighting Technical Director **The Incredible Hulk** Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | Tony Etienne, Look Development Lead **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull** Henri Tan, Creature Technical Director **Iron Man** Adam Marisett, Visual Effects Artist **King Kong** Chad Moffitt, Senior Animator **King of the Hill** Michael Loya, Director **Kingdom Hospital** Daniel Osaki, Visual Effects Artist | Megan Majewski, 3D Animator | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Kingdom of Heaven** Shawn Walsh, Digital Composer **Letters from Iwo Jima** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Live Free or Die Hard** Jessica Alcorn, Composer **Lord of the Rings Trilogy** Chad Moffitt, Senior Animator **Lost** Scott Dewis, Visual Effects Artist **Lucasfilm Animation Singapore** Sandro Di Segni, Senior Effects Technical Director/Lead Digital Artist | Ming Chang, Lighting Technical Director | Adrian Ng Chee Wei, Character Animator/Seema Gopalakrishnan, CG Software Developer **Mass Effect (VG)** Sung-Hun (Ryan) Lim, 3D Modeler **Matrix: Revolutions** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Shawn Walsh, Color & Lighting Technical Director **Master & Commander: The Far Side of the World** Robert Bourgeault, CG Artist **Metal Gear Solid 4 (VG)** Josh Herrig, Artist | Yuta Shimizu, Artist **The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Night at the Museum** Allen Holbrook, Animator | Adam Yaniv, Character Animator | Chad Moffitt, Animator | Kristin Sedore, Lighter **Persepolis** Marianne Lebel, Animator **Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End** Ben Sanders, Character Animator | Allen Holbrook, Animator | Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything: A VeggieTales Movie** Mike Dharney, Animation Supervisor **Reign of Fire** Lino DiSalvo, Animator **Resident Evil: Extinction** Joshua Herrig, Visual Effects Artist **Robots** Arun Ram-Mohan, Additional Lighting **Rome** Teh-Wei Yeh, Matchmove Artist **The Santa Clause 2** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Daniel Osaki, Visual Effects Artist **Scarface (VG)** Maya Zuckerman, Mocap 3D Generalist **Shrek the Third** Rani Naamani, Animator **Shrek the Third (VG)** Samuel Tung, Technical Artist **Sin City** Michael Cozens, Lead Animator **Smallville** Geeta Basantani, Lead Composer **Speed Racer** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer **Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith** Andrew Doucette, Character Animator | Nicholas Markel, Pre-Visualization **Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (VG)** Arun Ram-Mohan, 3D Artist | Jessica Mih, Level Artist **Stargate SG-1** Aruna Inversin, Digital Compositing Artist | Daniel Osaki, Visual Effects Artist | Shawn Walsh, Digital

Your name here.

VFS 3D ANIMATION & VISUAL EFFECTS | CLASSICAL ANIMATION | DIGITAL CHARACTER ANIMATION
Vancouver Film School. Countless paths. vfs.com/animationvfx



Effects Supervisor **Stargate: Atlantis** Daniel Osaki, 3D Animator | Megan Majewski, 3D Animator | Alec McClymont, 3D Artist **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Jami Gigot, Concept Artist **Transformers** Allen Holbrook, Animator | Henri Tan, Creature Technical Director **Unreal Tournament III (VG)** Scott Dossett, Artist **Valiant** Robert Bourgeault, Lighting Technical Director **Viva Pinata** Megan Majewski, Animator **WALL-E** Mark Shirra, Layout Artist **Watchmen** Jelmer Boskma, Previs Modeler | Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Supervisor | Cynthia Rodriguez del Castillo, Visual Effects Artist **World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade (VG)** Carman Cheung, Animator **A Wrinkle in Time** Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer and many more.



Celebrating the Animation Works
of Women All Over the World

Reel
Film Festival for **Women**[®]

Saturday, March 28th
11:00 a.m.
Laemmle Music Hall 3

For more information and to purchase tickets please visit
www.ReelFestivalForWomen.org or call 818.749.6162

Animation Magazine's Oscar Watch

[part 4 of 4]

SHORTS

WWW.ANIMATIONMAGAZINE.NET

Shorts Race Emerges as Sublime Global Sampler.

by Ellen Wolff

The conventional wisdom about animated shorts is that they can spotlight emerging talent, test new techniques or explore subjects that might be considered offbeat for more commercial films. These bursts of creativity and wit are likely to reflect the international reach of animation, and this year's nominees continue that tradition, representing artists from America, Britain, France, Japan and Russia. The choices of the Academy's Animation Branch were not without surprises however, with only one nomination going to a film from a major studio.

That would be the nod to Pixar's *Presto*, an action-packed five-minute short about a vengeful magician's rabbit that marks the directorial debut of veteran animator Doug Sweetland (*Toy Story*, *Cars*). *Presto* enjoyed a high-profile theatrical showcase as the opener for the Oscar-nominated feature *WALL•E*, and astute viewers might have noticed that it was billed as "A Pixar Animation Studios Cartoon." "We were really emulating a cel-style animation, and trying to get airtight holds on the characters," Sweetland explains. While *Presto* employed

toonist first, even though it's not technically what I do as an animator," says Sweetland. "Nothing made me happier when people on this show recognized that it was a cartoon."

Sweetland credits his experienced crew with keeping him from "overcomplicating" *Presto* during nearly 16 months in production. "I had the least amount of experience at my position. I was the only 'first timer.' Everybody else had led departments before, so I benefited from their experience." Sweetland's major insight from the experience of directing his first short would undoubtedly resonate with his fellow nominees: "Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should!"

A similar sense of discretion also guided directors Alan Smith and Adam Foulkes, nominees for *This Way Up*. While they are commercial anima-

tings. That was part design and part logistics." They also avoided dialogue, and Smith notes, "We loved the restriction of trying to tell a story where these characters couldn't speak because they were maintaining a dignified silence out of respect for the body!"

The deadpan humor of *This Way Up* has attracted attention at a slew of festivals, including Sundance, and stirred a great online buzz. Smith & Foulkes, meanwhile, have resumed making commercials, for although their short had back-

Alan Smith & Adam Foulkes' *This Way Up*Kunio Kato's *La Maison en Petits Cubes*

Pixar's CG tools for character animation and the simulation of cloth and crowds, they were applied with a "toon" sensibility. "I would like to consider myself a car-

toonist first, even though it's not technically what I do as an animator," says Sweetland. "Nothing made me happier when people on this show recognized that it was a cartoon."

tion pros at London-based Nexus, the duo took a hiatus to make this silent black comedy about two hapless undertakers trying to bury a corpse. Their eight-minute short blends 3D CG characters within 2D environments, which enabled Smith & Foulkes to focus their attention on subtle comic behaviors. As Smith explains, "It was a six month production,

ing from the BBC, Nexus, France's Arcadi and The Animation Show in the U.S., Smith deadpans, "It was not a money-making venture. But we're intensively writing the next project, and developing long form ideas." Should *This Way Up* win the Oscar, it will illustrate yet another truism about animated shorts: They can be great calling cards for directors with feature film dreams.

Digital animation techniques may be front-and-center in *Presto* and *This Way Up*, but they play a subtler role in the 12-minute nominee from Japan, *La Maison en Petits Cubes* (*The House of Small Cubes*). Animator Kunio Kat used a mix of 2D CG and drawings on paper to create a handmade look for his meditation on the memories of an old man. His character lives atop a teetering tower of blocks

MAR•09

15

surrounded by rising floodwaters, and he survives by adding cubes that push his tower even higher.

Kat, who creates animation for TV and the Web through Robot Communications in Tokyo, has become a favorite on the festival circuit. The poignancy of *The House of Small Cubes* has touched audiences worldwide and won honors at Annecy, Hiroshima and Milan. It's the kind of beautifully executed, highly individual film that still captures the imagination of Academy members who select animated shorts. As veteran Animation Branch member Bill Kroyer of Rhythm & Hues observes, "The Academy has always responded to a great personal film. If anything, I think there's a little bit of a prejudice against the big studios and the richer productions when it comes to shorts. People love the fact that animation is still an art form that can be made by a guy in his apartment."

Emud Mokhberi & Thierry Marchand's *Oktapodi*



Labor of Love

Kroyer also thinks that Animation Branch members appreciate the painstaking effort that's required to make a hand-drawn film like this year's Russian nominee, *Lavatory Lovestory*. The 10-minute, largely black and white film by Konstantin Bronzit chronicles—without words—a love story between two attendants in a public restroom. As Kroyer notes, "It's amazing how such simple drawings can convey such subtle expressions and a pretty complex story. It's the furthest thing from a rendered CG film. But films can transcend their style if their content is engaging. What people love to see are looks that perfectly match the tone of the story that's being told."

This year's final Animated Short Film

nominee tells another unusual love story—one between two octopi. What makes the two-minute Maya-animated

toon *Oktapodi* unique in this year's field, however, is that it was made by six students at France's Gobelins. "It's fairly common in France to do group films," explains Emud Mokhberi, one of the film's co-directors. "Our idea was to reunite two octopi who've been separated. We thought 'Where do people eat octopi?' China? Japan? Cuba? Greece?" The group initially chose China because they envisioned a chase sequence where the octopi splash through descending terraces of rice paddies. Then DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda* appeared on the horizon, and the students changed course. They discovered pictures online of terraced swimming pools on a Greek isle, and the signature chase sequence of *Oktapodi* was transformed.

Mokhberi recalls that the students reached a breakthrough when *Ice Age* director (and Animated Short Oscar winner) Chris Wedge visited Gobelins. "We showed him our Flash animation and he laughed where we wanted him to. That gave us reassurance that this could work." The

Konstantin Bronzit's *Lavatory Lovestory*



honors that followed include Best of Show at SIGGRAPH and awards at Annecy and Imagina. Mokhberi, who's currently working at Sony Imageworks, admits, "When I heard the crowd reaction at an Academy screening, it was more than I could have imagined. Then I heard an Academy member say 'That can't be a student film.' But it was six guys spending seven months doing the best we could."

"Without a doubt, *Oktapodi* is a viable candidate," Bill Kroyer asserts. "It's remarkable that it's only a couple of minutes long. It's a perfect length, like a Minute Waltz. I do tend to think this Oscar category is a long shot for students, but the Animation Branch people who judge these shorts are filmmakers themselves. Because they have an appreciation for what goes into short films, they can sometimes lean towards the underdog." Whatever the odds for any of these Animated Short Film nominees, as a group they provide an interesting reflection of today's state of the art. As Kroyer remarks, "Short films lead the way in animation—things occur here first." ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-area-based journalist who specializes in animation, visual effects and education.

Doug Sweetland's *Presto*





GREAT CONTENT: it's more than what you do, it's who you are.

If you're passionate about creating great content, the NAB Show is the ultimate place to find everything necessary to bring your vision to life. Experience a wealth of hands-on educational opportunities presented by the producers, directors and cinematographers influencing today's edgiest content.

Visit the unparalleled exhibit floor to see, touch and test all of the technologies enabling HD and 3D. Here you will find virtually every

innovation driving production, editing, animation, gaming, widgets, social networking and more.

From big screen to small screen to no screen and beyond, professionals with creative passion come to the NAB Show to exchange solutions and strategies for developing award-winning content for local, national and global audiences. Join the community that shares your passion for creating excellence. For more information, visit www.nabshow.com.

NABSHOW
Where Content Comes to Life™



Conferences: April 18–23, 2009 / Exhibits: April 20–23
Las Vegas Convention Center / Las Vegas, Nevada USA

www.nabshow.com



reel
IMPRESSIONS

Submit Your Reel
at www.nabshow.com/submitreel today!



An Amazon Princess Is Reborn

Director Lauren Montgomery and writer Michael Jelenic discuss the behind-the-scenes secrets of the new animated movie about that iconic heroine known as Wonder Woman.

By any standard, Princess Diana of Themyscira (a.k.a. Wonder Woman) may be one of the most intriguing female superheroes in pop culture history. William Moulton Marston's sublime creation, who first began her earthly adventures in the pages of DC's *All Star Comics* in December 1941, has been a consistently popular character. Although die-hard fans have been hungry for a live-action feature adaptation for many years, animation aficionados are patiently awaiting the arrival of a new Warner Bros. / DC Universe movie on DVD and Blu-ray (and On Demand and Pay-Per-View) slated for March 3.

Based on a script by Michael Jelenic (*The Batman*, *Legion of Super Heroes*) and exec produced by the legendary Bruce Timm, the feature is directed by Lauren Montgomery, who co-directed last year's *Superman Doomsday*. *Wonder Woman* explores the origins of the character and charts her development from a Greek heroine to the iconic character we all recognize in comic-books and the campy '70s TV show starring Lynda Carter. "We had to hit certain ele-

ments that are part of Wonder Woman's myth, and my job was to answer what sort of ramifications her origins would have on her character during her journey to becoming a hero," notes Jelenic. "It's basically trying to boil down essential Wonder Woman elements into one story. We looked at the stuff that the fans had to see and then tried to put a twist on them. We've seen the lasso and the invisible jet before, so what's another way we could use them? I wanted to incorporate all these iconic Wonder Woman moments into the larger overall story."

For Montgomery, directing a project about a female superhero was quite a welcome treat. "I definitely prefer female leads because I feel they're just easier to direct in their acting," she notes. "They're allowed to show a much wider range of emotions. A woman can be feminine and tomboyish, and she can hit all the same poses that a man can hit. But if you start putting a man in a feminine pose, especially a superhero man, it doesn't fly. So when you're dealing with the male superheroes, you have a much, much more restricted range of act-

ing. Plus, on a personal level, I think it's good to give girl fans more options. When I was a girl, I would watch *Thundercats* and all I really had to choose from was Cheetara. I always wanted more female heroes to choose from and I never really got them. Hopefully we'll be able to explore more of them in these DVDs."

According to Montgomery, the designs for the project were kept simple enough for the animation, but there was a general feeling that they needed to be more detailed and less cartoony to suit the PG-13 content of the production. "Wonder Woman went through a lot of different versions," she says. "Gradually, and for the betterment of the film, we determined that she should look strong and athletic without being manly. She's an Amazon, so I wanted her to be able to be taken seriously. We wanted her to look like she worked out, and not just make her a curvy, busty pinup. So I tried to give her slightly slimmer hips versus the hourglass figure, and I think it makes her more believable and engaging in a lot of action."

Montgomery says the color palette for



Lauren Montgomery

the film is slightly different from previous DC Universe adventures. "Our color stylist, Craig Cuqro, used colored filters to set the characters into their backgrounds, and our overseas studio Moi added a lot of diffusion, which gives the characters a really nice kind of glowing look—especially during the scenes in Themyscira. The soft diffusion throughout the scenes in Themyscira makes everything seem much nicer, like a paradise."



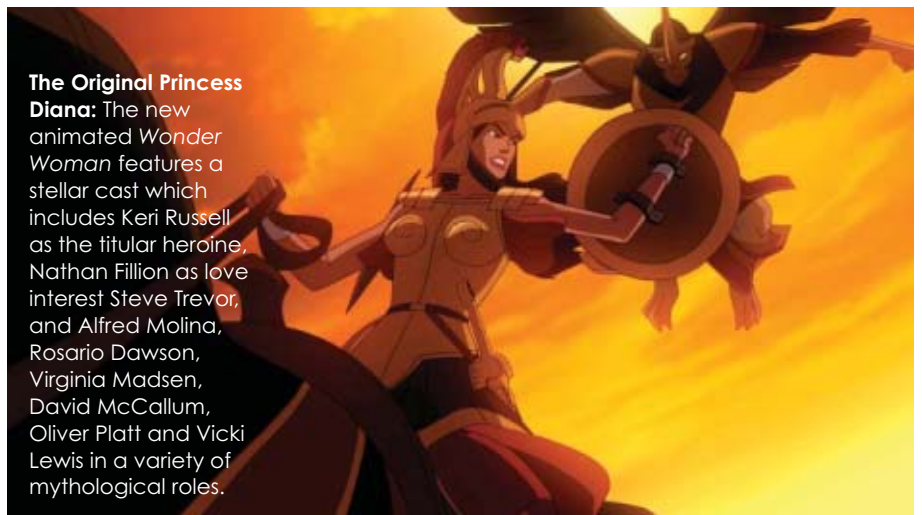
Michael Jelenic

The director also praises Jelenic's entertaining script for hitting two key goals: offering fans a healthy dose of action as well as delivering lighter moments. "Seeing his first drafts really inspired me because there was a lot of action that showed her true strength," says Montgomery. "He told a story that captivated me the entire way. Beyond the action, Michael is good at interjecting a lot of humor—Steve Trevor's [the love interest] sense of humor echoes Michael's in many ways. He also likes to write a lot of director-embellished action scenes, which didn't always make it easier on me. That's the one thing I'd like to punch him for. But otherwise, he did a great job!"

To prepare for the assignment, Jelenic buried his nose in lots of Greek mythology books and brushed up on his knowledge of character histories such as Ares, Hades, Hera and Zeus. He also had to work hard to create a superheroine fit for 2009 audiences. "Diana had to represent all the feminine ideals and virtues, the things that make women great," he points out. "At the same time, she's a very strong female character in terms of both her physical prowess and her personality. So we tried to find a balance to create a character that doesn't lose her femininity by being a strong action hero. If there is a message to the film, it's basically that men and women are not perfect. Men have their problems. Women have their problems. And when they interact, these problems often grow. But at the end of the day, men and women are actually stronger and better when they work together to overcome these problems."

The Original Princess

Diana: The new animated *Wonder Woman* features a stellar cast which includes Keri Russell as the titular heroine, Nathan Fillion as love interest Steve Trevor, and Alfred Molina, Rosario Dawson, Virginia Madsen, David McCallum, Oliver Platt and Vicki Lewis in a variety of mythological roles.



Teaming Up with Timm

Of course, working with Warner Bros. Animation guru Bruce Timm was quite a special honor for both Jelenic and Montgomery. "Working with Bruce is extremely interesting, and not in a bad way," says Montgomery, laughing. "This is going to greatly understate it, but he knows what he's doing. It's always a really good learning experience just to sit back and watch him, to see how he works, because Bruce definitely has his own way of doing things. Pretty much all the calls he makes are the right calls—it's obvious in the body of work that he's produced. When he makes a call, even if I don't 100 percent agree with it, I usually just let it go because I know the film is going to be better for it."

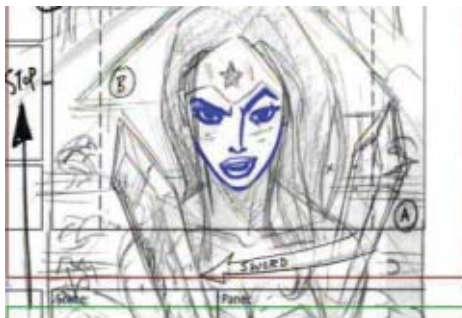
She also believes that Timm has an amaz-

and know immediately how to rearrange the scenes to make things that much better and that much smoother. That's what I'm trying to learn from him now."

Influenced at an early age by Disney features, Montgomery says she was always more of a fan of animation than comics. Her love of superheroes didn't really kick in until *Batman: The Animated Series*, which offered serious stories and eventually led her to jobs on the *Superman* and *Justice League* series. "[Working with Bruce Timm] was surreal at first, but now it's just another day of work," she admits. "I've kind of adapted to it. But every once in a while when I sit back and think about it, it's like, 'Here I am doing what I've been waiting my whole life to do.' And that's cool. Even on the days where it's hectic and there's intense schedules and the

"I never focus on the 'one of the only women' aspect of my job—I just always liked action and wanted to work in this genre. I never realized how few women there were in superhero animation. I just thought, 'I like to draw, surely all the other girls like to draw, too.'"

—*Wonder Woman* director Lauren Montgomery

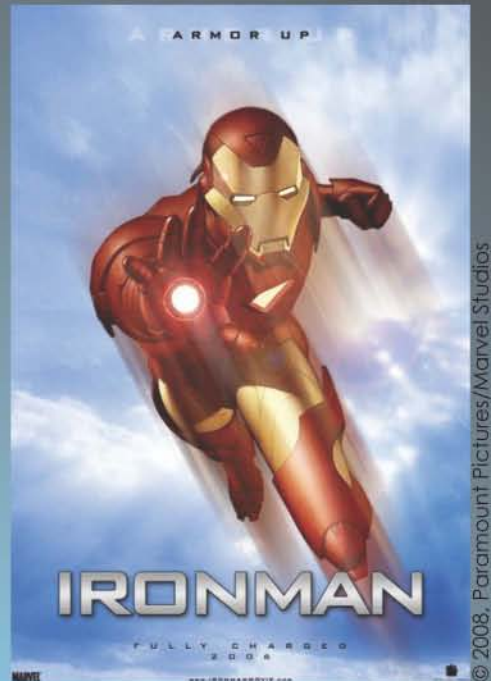
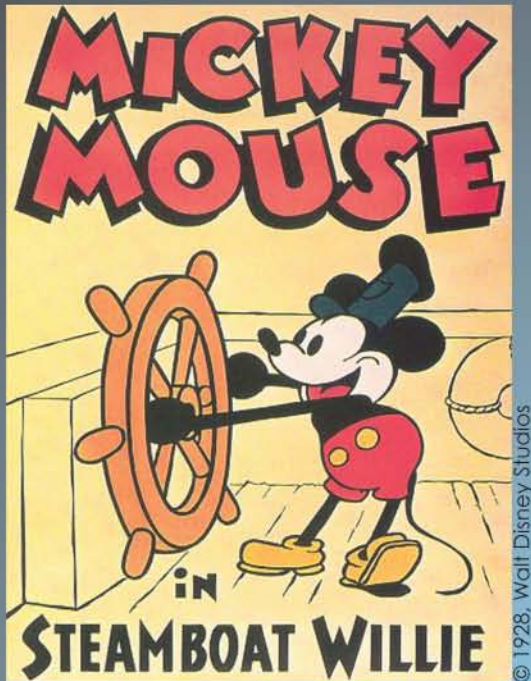


ing ability to edit and rearrange scenes to improve a project. "I'm still kind of focused on the storyboards, planning everything out so it plays the way I want it. I don't really think about cutting or rearranging scenes because I already did that in the storyboards. But Bruce can look at that footage



deadlines are looming, and I might be pulling my hair out, I know there's no other job that I would be happier doing." ■

Warner Bros. Animation's *Wonder Woman* will be available on DVD, Blu-ray and Pay-Per-View/On Demand on March 3.



Animation and Visual Effects Go Hand in Hand!

Turn to Animation Magazine
& www.animationmagazine.net to
learn about the latest technologies and understand
the vfx secrets of your favorite movies and TV shows.



and

www.animationmagazine.net

We've got Toon Town and VFX-ville covered!

The Penguins Have Landed

Nickelodeon and DreamWorks bring *The Penguins of Madagascar* to the small screen.

by Mercedes Milligan

Now that they have won the hearts of audiences around the world with their slap-stick cameos in DreamWorks Animation's blockbusters *Madagascar* and *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* and starred in a holiday special, the action-loving team of penguins have scuttled on to television in Nickelodeon Animation Studio's new 26 episode series.

The Penguins of Madagascar finds Skipper, Rico, Kowalski and Private back where it all began: Central Park Zoo. Their efforts as a crack squad of top secret operatives (in their minds, at least) are often hindered by the antics of

King Julien and his lemur subjects. But, justice never rests, and neither do our conniving feathery friends.

"After the success of *Madagascar*, DreamWorks Animation was interested in developing the penguins further," says creative consultant Tom McGrath, who directed both features, "[We] started writing a penguin feature to be a prequel to the *Madagascar* movies. Central Park Zoo would be their H.Q., and they essentially could go anywhere in the world by mailing themselves via overnight delivery. It opened up a lot of possibilities for story. DreamWorks Animation and Nickelodeon saw it as a poten-

tial series with the addition of King Julien." When exec producers Mark McCorkle and Bob Schooley (*Kim Possible*, *Hercules*) came on, the project instantly clicked.

"The development process was well underway when we came aboard," says Schooley, "Our first day on the job, a work-in-progress animatic was being screened for the DreamWorks team and the Nickelodeon folks. We were fresh eyes and fresh voices in the process, so everybody was open to our input." McCorkle adds: "That first episode picked up momentum from that point, then we blinked and we were in full bore production!"

Though the pressure of adapting a feature property for TV, especially in CG, seems daunting, the two studios turned out to be a perfect match: "The combination of DreamWorks' experience in creating the hit movie *Madagascar* and Nickelodeon's expertise in creating hit TV shows is a one-two punch," muses Nickelodeon's president of animation, Brown Johnson, "Mireille Soria, Tom McGrath [and Eric Darrell], the producer and directors of the features, were amazing partners."

"It's a great relationship," McGrath concurs, "[Nickelodeon] is very accommodating, considering their tight deadlines!"

Feature Looks on TV Time

There was a time, not long ago, when uttering the words "CG animated series" caused visible wincing in animation fans. Looking at the remarkable quality of *Penguins*, it's hard to recall the sometimes painful steps the industry took to bring the magic of feature-quality CG to the tube. But for this crew, aside from schedule adjustments, translating the look of *Madagascar* was pretty painless.

"In features, we have two years to make eighty minutes of animation, while they create somewhere in the neighborhood of 26 hours over two seasons of television," marvels McGrath.

Johnson explains how Nickelodeon's CG experience has culminated in this new show: "Nick Animation Studio currently produces the equivalent of 12 CG-animated features every year. As in any new field, we've experienced a huge learning curve," she admits, "But now, we've got the CG machine humming."

"The CG team here at Nickelodeon has set up a creative process and a production process that far exceeds anything that has been done for television in the past," notes McCorkle, "There is a great deal of control that happens here in Burbank, and there's a con-





Brown Johnson



Tom McGrath



Bob Schooley



Mark McCorkle

stant back and forth between the team here and the studios overseas." Schooley enthuses, "The animators have really risen to the challenge. We always see little touches and extra nuances that show how much fun the animators are having with this project. We have been blown away by the CG work on this series."

Though the films and characters were created using DreamWorks' proprietary software, EMO, the studio re-rigged the little guys in Maya to make it easier for Nickelodeon's animators. McGrath says he is impressed by how well the TV crew was able to adapt the feel of the features, finding ways to simplify highly complex renders like fur, water and large sets while maintaining a superior-quality look.

A key part of this transition was supervising director Bret Haaland (*Father of the Pride, Futurama*). McCorkle and Schooley

describe Haaland, who makes the rounds between directors, storyboards and CG artists, as "part zen genius, part traffic cop." "Not to mention, the man is the best storyboard pitcher in the business—the man can do any voice!"

One aspect that did provide a challenge was finding a way to differentiate between our stout, two-toned heroes. McGrath says the original designs seemed too "homogenous," so steps were taken to individualise each bird: "For example, their eyes are different colors. Rico was given a spiky plume and a scar. The differences in height are more dramatic, which really helps to quickly distinguish the characters from one another."

Diving in with the Penguins

No doubt plenty of fans are excited to see the surly group of fowl take their rightful place in the spotlight (a sneak peak drew 14 million viewers last November). And so are the cre-



ative gurus behind the move. The new urban setting and the dynamics between penguin and lemur open up a world of possibilities.

"We play the penguins as very much at home in New York. They can come and go from the zoo as their missions demand. King Julien and the lemurs are new to the city and to the human world in general ... So we get to milk comedy out of Julien's discovery of this new life," McCorkle says. "Chaos vs. control!"—as Johnson punchily sums up.

While Julien (voiced by Danny Jacobs) struggles with his king-of-everything mentality, the penguins function as a tight-knit team: Muscle head Rico (*Futurama*'s John DiMaggio), brainy Kowalski (Jeff Bennett), courageous Private (Patrick Stuart) and their no-nonsense leader, Skipper. McGrath reflects on the appeal of the former bit-players: "There's something fun in watching little waddling penguins with a Kirk Douglas complex whose ability to overcome the most extreme circumstances far exceeds the tools nature gave them."

He also notes that in the series format, audiences will get a chance to delve into each critter's unique POV and particular brand of craziness—leaving open plenty of opportunities for hijinx!

Though the mix of loveable characters, adventure and plenty of humor are a classic combination, *Penguins* is upping the game for TV animation. "We can say that we have never worked on show like this before," Schooley says proudly. "Each episode is scrutinized and revised over and over again. It really is a hybrid of a feature approach and a television approach." McCorkle adds that, "Even after many drafts of script, we make story changes during the multiple versions of the animatic. Writers, storyboard artists, directors, editor ... everybody is trying to elevate the material."

On a show striving for perfection, McGrath has a unique way of relaxing—by reprising his role as penguin-in-chief Skipper! "It's a lot of fun for me to go in an hour a week to record," he says, noting that the temptation to bark orders in the manner of a surly sea bird is hard to fight outside the studio. As for the perks of stardom: "I never imagined I'd ever hear myself coming out of a Happy Meal toy, but it made my mom happy." ■

The Penguins of Madagascar premieres March 28 at 9:30 p.m. on Nickelodeon, then moves into the 10 p.m. slot April 4.



THE 7TH
ANNUAL
VES
AWARDS

**7th Annual
Visual Effects Society Awards**
Saturday, February 21, 2009
Hyatt Regency Century Plaza Hotel, Beverly Hills, CA

Honoring



Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall
VES Lifetime Achievement Award

and



Phil Tippett
Georges Méliès Award for
Pioneering & Artistic Excellence

New categories this year

Outstanding Animation in an Animated Motion Picture
Outstanding Visual Effects in a Student Project, as Presented by Autodesk

Steven Spielberg
Honorary Chairman

Jeffrey A. Okun
Awards Chairman

*For sponsorships or tickets, contact Michael Teta Associates
at 818-817-2310 or michael@mtaevents.com*

Talent. Experience. Knowledge.



Smash! Bang! Ka-Pow!

Team Smithereen, an energetic new series of shorts which is described as *Mr. Bill*-meets-*Jackass*, has a whole lot of fun mixing the world of puppets with animation and real stunts. **by Ramin Zahed**

Those who have fond memories of that insane team of pain-loving stunt-crazy guys on MTV's *Jackass* will certainly get a kick out of *Team Smithereen*, a new puppet/animation hybrid series created by Dan Clark, Don Asher and Dave Pressler. Produced by The Dan Clark Company, WILDBRAIN and Jetix, the 26-part series of short vignettes revolves around a pain-defying band of foam latex puppets, shot in high def and animated in post (via India's Paprikaas Animation Studios).

We were fortunate enough to visit Clark and company a few weeks ago, as they were shooting an episode

which pays homage to Disney's much-loved classic movie, *Tron*. Working out of a spacious house in the Los Feliz hills neighborhood of Los Angeles, the *Team Smithereen* crew is totally jazzed about creating a fun new show that is bursting with a mad vibe of color and creativity.



credit Don Asher

"We are shooting the show like an indie movie," says Clark, who has worked on a long list of award-winning shows (*Yo Gabba Gabba*, *B.R.A.T.S. of the Lost Nebula*, *The Save-Ums!*). "It's down and dirty—and it's done by a small team of about 15 enthusiastic people."

Clark explains that the show's main characters—Brave Little Francis, Whoop, Thrill Cat and Stunt Pig—are latex puppets, whose eyes are later animated by the team in India. "The show is modeled after animation—we experiment with squash and stretch effects—but the action is photo-realistic. We shoot all the stunts in real-time and none of them are CG. We actually shoot them in high def in the real world." He adds with a laugh, "Oh, and we're really big on ripping their skins off!"

According to Clark, the origins of the show go all the way back to 2003 when he and his partners were using a big

house in the Hollywood Hills as a production center. "We had just finished the second season of *Save-Ums!* and had lost the Daytime Emmy to *The Batman*, so we found a hollow puppet and filled it with a mixture of baked beans and jello," he recalls. "We're all men in our 40s, but we got a big kick of dropping a stone on the

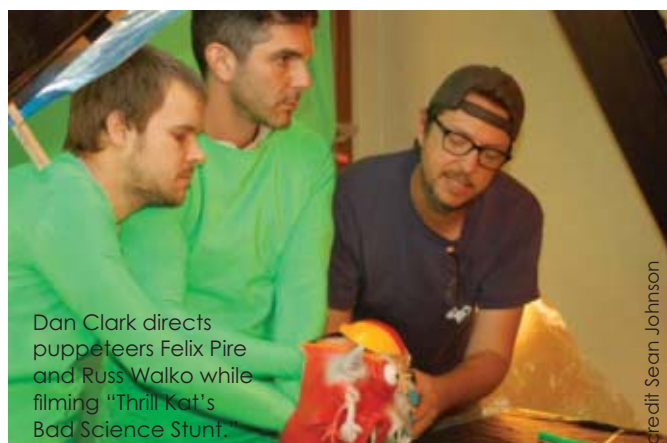
puppet and taping it and playing it all back in slow-mo. It was really reminiscent of the old Fleischer cartoons!"

When Jetix and WILDBRAIN expressed interest in the show's premise, the team knew that they were on to something that could push the envelope to a certain degree. "We loved *Team Smithereen* from the moment we first saw it, for a bunch of reasons," says Marc Buhaj, senior VP of programming at Jetix Europe. "It has a unique style, and great high-impact comedy in a 'snack size' format ... One big stunt per episode, one big wipeout you'll never forget, and one OMG moment you'll tell all your friends about. Second, the characters were brilliantly designed and immediately endearing. Finally, the style and technique are uniquely suited to this kind of action. The characters are still basically cartoons, but they are also

Danger Zone: Series co-creator Dan Clark (left) and puppeteer Sean Johnson come up with many insane ways to challenge their eager, crash-test puppets.



credit Felix Pire



Dan Clark directs puppeteers Felix Pire and Russ Walko while filming "Thrill Kat's Bad Science Stunt."

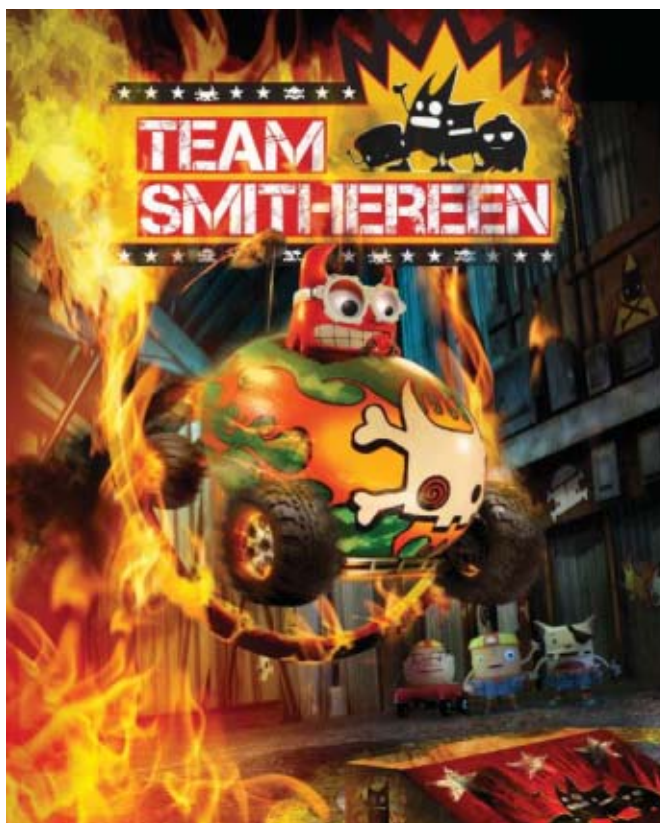
credit Sean Johnson

real, physical, vinyl puppets that wipe out in all sorts of very real ways. We really feel the splat, the crash, the shattering into a million tiny pieces. Of course they are always OK in the end, and always come back for more!"

WILDBRAIN's head of creative Bob Higgins also shares Buhaj's enthusiasm. "I think that just the basic idea makes you laugh," he says. "It's completely left of center, irreverent and fresh. I had never seen this particular look with these kind of characters and this sensibility in one package before. Plus, it's artistic and creative-driven and something that we can do without breaking the bank. Also, it's very Internet-friendly because of its 90-second length. We're hoping to build it up slowly, as it has all the makings of a cool viral hit."

While the execs are coming up with new ways of building word-of-mouth about the show, the creative team continues to experiment with the puppets in various calamitous environments. They've actually shot poor little Francis trying to drink from a cow's udder at a local dairy and even experimented with Nitrogen explosions in Coke bottles!

"One of the great things about the show is that the designs have a real tangible quality to them. Our goal is to have the show inspire kids all over America to make their own home versions of



the show in their backyard," says Clark as his eyes light up with a certain level of mischief. Let's just hope they'll leave the helpless cows out of it! ■

You can visit the show's production blog at teamsmithereen.blogspot.com. Jetix plans to air the shorts in the first quarter of 2009.

Action Mouse Is Ready to Roll

Toon Disney gets a new name (Disney XD) and is rebranded as a new boy-focused destination this month.

While young girls continue to demand more episodes of *Hannah Montana* and *iCarly*, six- to 14-year-old boys have become the unreachable dream target of kids' TV programmers. This month, Disney will try again to capture the elusive boy auds by rebranding Toon Disney as Disney XD and providing an impressive selection of new toons and live-action shows both on TV and online.

On February 13, the cabler will officially launch by picking up Dan Povenmire and Jeff Marsh's hit toon series *Phineas and Ferb* from Disney Channel and premiering a new live-action action-adventure show called *Aaron Stone*. The first day's schedule also includes the premiere of Studio B's *Kid vs. Kat* and the Breakthrough Animation/Teletoon series *Jim-*

Some of Disney XD's new lineup: (Clockwise from top left) *Kid vs. Kat*, *Kid Knievel*, *Jimmy Two Shoes*, *RoboDZ*, *Phineas and Ferb*, *Spectacular Spider-Man*.

my Two Shoes. Short form animated offerings *RoboDZ* (a CG and live-action hybrid from Disney and Toei Animation) and *Bruno the Great* (a Studio Bozzetto production) will also make their debut that day.

On tap for later this year are the live-action skateboarding adventure comedy *Zeke & Luther* from Turtle Rock Productions and *Kid Knievel*, a 2D animated comedy created by Sandro Corsaro and exec produced by Chris Savino (*Johnny Test*). Disney XD will also offer toons such as *Yin Yang Yo!*, *The Spectacular Spider-Man*, *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Superman: The Animated Series*, *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man* to over 72 million households in 2009.

"Boys, like girls, place incredibly high standards on their entertainment choices," notes Gary Marsh, president of entertainment for Disney Channels Worldwide. "They demand

complex, multi-faceted characters that, while not perfect, are smart, selfless, determined and brave. Disney

XD will deliver those kinds of characters and stories in a

wide range of formats—animation, live action, movies and sports—and

it will focus on the core value of accomplishment."

According to Eric Coleman, senior VP of original series at Walt Disney TV Animation, the studio is developing a wide

range of programs in a variety of styles, but what they all share are the key elements essential in a successful show: strong characters, good storytelling, high production values and heart. "We're adding to the mix a lot of humor and a lot of adrenaline," says the veteran exec who joined the Disney team after a long stint at Nickelodeon. "Boys want shows made just for them, and they've told us loud and clear they want big laughs and they want big action."

When asked to offer advice to animation creators who are hoping to find a home for their project on XD, Coleman notes, "Be original! It's much easier said than done, but it is essential for creators to break through the clutter with properties that have a clear, unique POV."

He says they're often inundated with projects about "a group of kids in a band who fight crime" or "a group of kids trapped in cyberspace ... who are in a band and fight crime." "We want shows that feel fresh, with fun main characters, engaging stories and a contemporary visual technique or style. Perhaps most importantly, the thrust of your show shouldn't come merely from clever jokes, but from great characters the audience can truly care about."

Coleman believes that *Kid Knievel*, the first original animated series created for the cabler, is a great example of the XD sensibility. "Its hero is a kid who's small in size but big in attitude. He's determined to become the world's greatest daredevil, and he finds the danger and excitement in everything he does, whether in an insane stunt or in brushing his teeth. He's so enthusiastic in his quest, it's hard not to root for him. I love the design and I love the physical energy in the show."

So, what about the old Disney tradition of developing TV shows based on the studio's popular features? Are there animated TV shows based on features such as *WALL•E* or *Bolt* in the pipeline? "For now we're really excited to develop brand new properties," Coleman assures. "We have this great opportunity to introduce new characters into the Disney canon, so we're going for it!" ■

To find out more about the brave, new world of the Mouse House destination visit tv.disney.go.com/disneyxd.

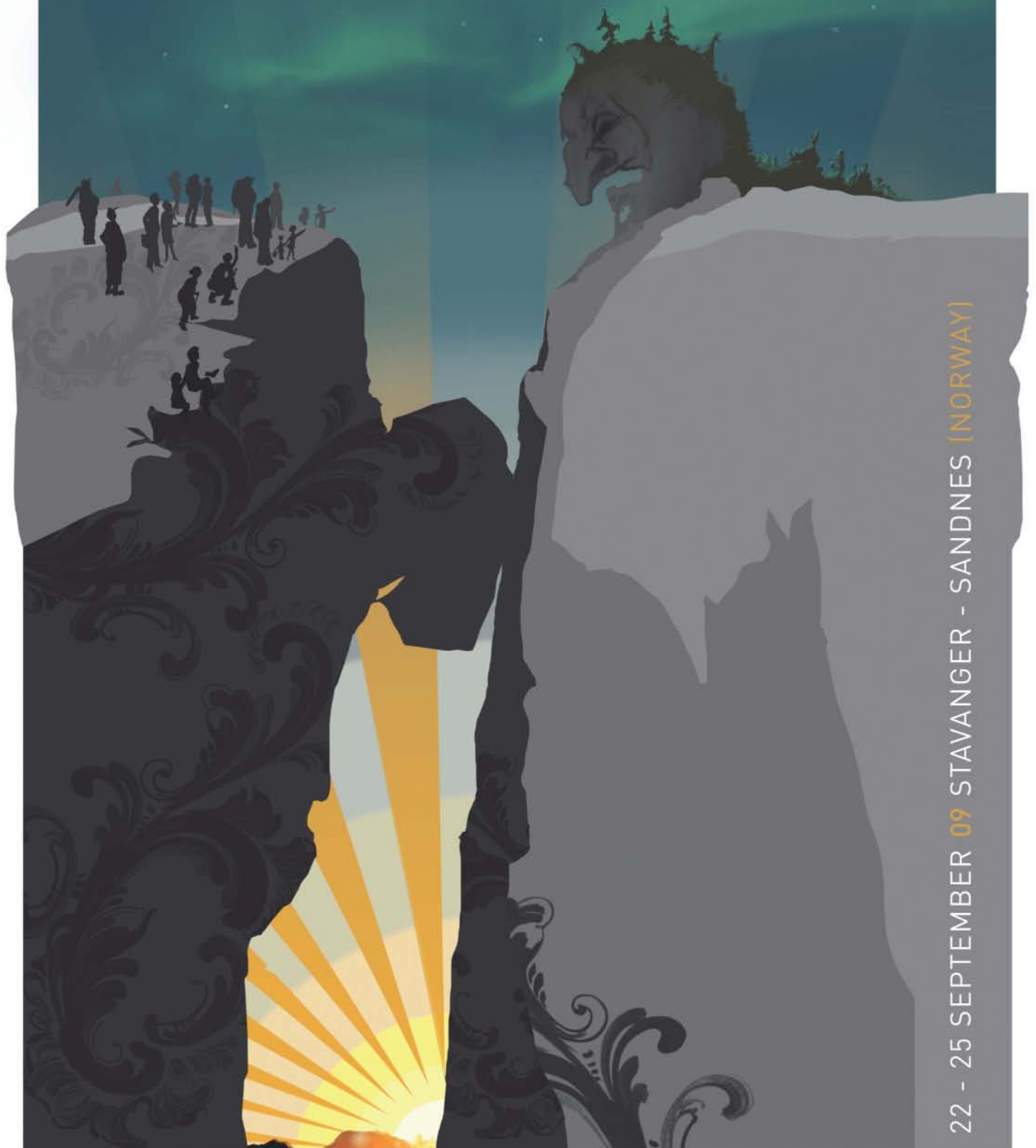


Eric Coleman



CARTOON FORUM ROGALAND

THE FORUM FOR EUROPEAN ANIMATION CO-PRODUCTIONS



22 - 25 SEPTEMBER 09 STAVANGER - SANDNES [NORWAY]

www.cartoon-media.eu

MEDIA
A programme of the European Union



NORWEGIAN FILM INSTITUTE



CITY OF STAVANGER



SANDNES KOMMUNE

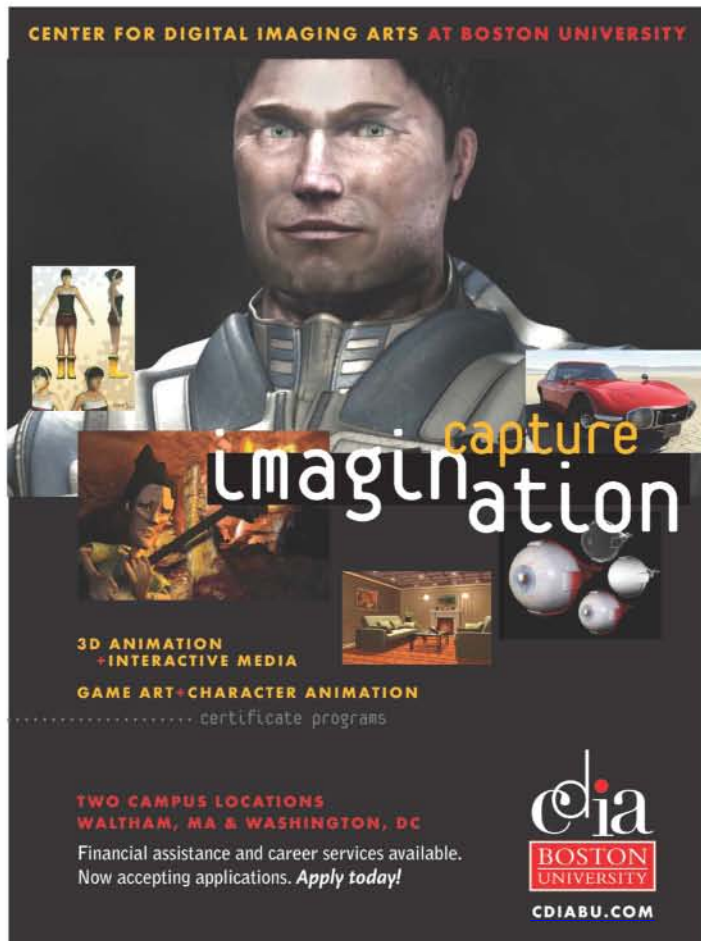


KULTUR- OG KIRKEDEPARTEMENTET



NRK

CENTER FOR DIGITAL IMAGING ARTS AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY



**capture
Imagination**

**3D ANIMATION
+ INTERACTIVE MEDIA**

GAME ART + CHARACTER ANIMATION

..... certificate programs

**TWO CAMPUS LOCATIONS
WALTHAM, MA & WASHINGTON, DC**

Financial assistance and career services available.
Now accepting applications. **Apply today!**

cdia
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
CDIABU.COM

**Simply nourishing
creativity.**



Animation in real time... real fast... real simple... real sharp!

No mouse. No computer. No hassles. Introducing the new LunchBox DV.

To engage elementary students, equipment must be simple. To motivate high school students, feedback must be instantaneous. To support college students, tools must be powerful. Professionals and schools worldwide know that the LunchBox DV is the standard for learning animation. No strings attached. Call or visit us on the web to find out more.

**ANIMATION
TOOLWORKS**

North America: 1.877.625.6438
Facsimile: 1.503.925.0221
Japan: MediaLink 81.471.86.1061
Korea: 70.7012.5059
Elsewhere: 1.503.625.6438

www.animationtoolworks.com

ANIMATION SUPPLIES

*The Complete Source for
All Your Animation Needs!*

- Everything for the Professional & Amateur
- Wholesale Prices / Most Orders Shipped the Same Day

**FAST, RELIABLE
WORLDWIDE
SERVICE**

CARTOON



colour
COMPANY, INC.
Est. 1947

Featuring Our Own...

CEL-VINYL PAINTS
and Acrylic Animation Discs

LARGEST SELECTION OF ANIMATION
BOND & ACETATE ANYWHERE!

©310/838-8467 • 800/523-3665 FAX 310/838-2531
9024 Lindblade Street, Culver City, CA 90232

www.cartooncolour.com

 **Lightfoot Ltd, inc.**

Animation Supplies at a Discount!

AnimationSupplies.com

School PO's Accepted
Teacher Workshops

PUNCHED ANIMATION PAPER \$10.95

- Lesson Plans
- Round Pegbars
- Acme Pegbars
- Hole Punches
- Lightboxes
- Software
- Pro Discs
- Pencils
- Animation Kits
- Starter Kits
- Header Strips
- Pencil Testers

(951)693-5165
(951)693-5166 fax

*Free Quotes for Schools

www.LightfootLtd.com
www.CartoonSupplies.com
www.AnimationSupplies.com

**STUDENTS
EDUCATORS
SCHOOLS**

**Save on
Thousands
of Popular
Software
Titles!**

- Adobe
- Autodesk
- Avid
- Boris
- Corel
- NewTek
- Maxon
- Pixologic
- Much More!

FREE CATALOG AVAILABLE

www.JourneyEd.com

1.800.874.9001

journeyEd
.com



Success starts here.
Register now for E3 Expo 2009.



The 2009 Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3 Expo)
is the can't miss event of the year for the
global interactive entertainment industry.

One Time. One Place. One Event.

June 2-4, 2009 • L.A. Convention Center • E3Expo.com

Produced By
IDG



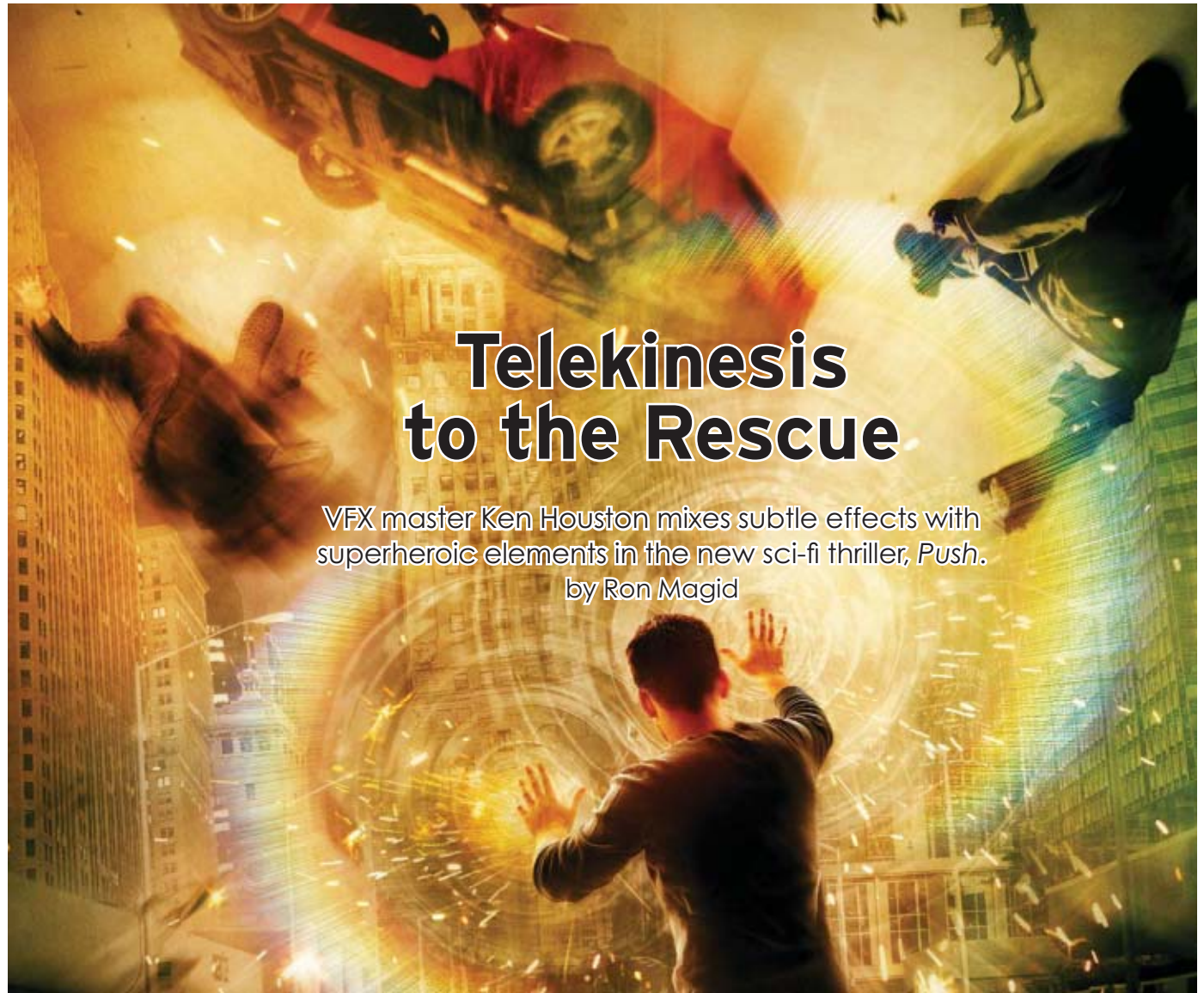
entertainment
software
association

© Entertainment Software Association 2009

Telekinesis to the Rescue

VFX master Ken Houston mixes subtle effects with superheroic elements in the new sci-fi thriller, *Push*.

by Ron Magid



The career of visual effects supervisor Kent Houston has straddled opposite ends of the genre's spectrum, from the outrageous imagery of Terry Gilliam's *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), *Time Bandits* (1981), *Brazil* (1985) and *The Brothers Grimm* (2005) through the understated *Angela's Ashes* (1999) and *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005). But his latest project, *Push* from director Paul McGuigan (*Lucky Number Slevin*), fused the amazing prospects of telekinesis and clairvoyance with a real-world edginess that demanded a less-is-more approach to the potentially unbelievable imagery.

Houston, a New Zealander who makes his home in Santa Monica, California, was surprised to learn that much of the research on which *Push* was based was conducted by the Rand Corporation in his adopted hometown. "The fascinating thing for me is this script is based on a concept arising from C.I.A. research that was done in the '50s and '60s, and oddly enough, I knew a lot about it because someone I'd worked

with knew one of the people involved and described some of the things that happened," Houston says. "One can be slightly cynical about it, but there's some strange stuff around and some very clever people involved. A lot of what is in the script is based on actual research that was done and there's a lot of reference to it early in the movie. It's pretty scary stuff."

Houston employed artists from Digiscope and his own vfx house, Peerless Camera Company, to begin visualizing the supernatural powers of the characters. "When Paul and I first started talking about the project, he wasn't sure what he wanted, but he was very clear that he didn't



want it to be like *Fantastic Four*, for obvious reasons," he recalls. "We just said, 'Do your stuff,' to the available artists and we just tried lots of effects, all sorts of things—particles and light effects and animation and lots of tricky image manipulation—probably over a hundred tests, and we just showed them all to Paul."

As the effects developed, it became clear that the telekinetic/clairvoyant effects would involve some sort of disruption/displacement in the atmosphere

rather than silly. "We used various forms of digital warping and digital paint together with very subtle work on the meniscus of the fluid on the eye surface to convey the sense that the actual underlying structure of the eye was physically changing."

Similarly, the atmospheric disruption/displacement that signaled the telekinesis was achieved using a digital warping of the characters' environment. "We worked very hard to create a very subtle effect to give the sense of a lot of power

ment," Houston says. "It involves relatively simple editorial ghosting, cutting, fixing of images a bit to help audiences understand that people are looking at something far off."

The biggest challenge for Houston and his effects team was the movie's relatively small budget. "Initially we had a limited number of visual effects. It started at about 18 shots, which went up to 180 and we finished the movie with around 400 shots," says Houston. "We tried to do a lot of stuff in camera, and we avoided doing effects for effects sake."

Fortunately, the physical effects supervisor was an old colleague, Mark Meddings (son of the great Derek Meddings of *Thunderbirds* fame), which enabled the kind of large-scale physical interaction of cars flying through the air depicted in *Push*'s advertising campaign. "Mark and I would collaborate on that with, again, relatively limited resources: We would work in tandem to realize the best thing possible."

Take the fish tanks (and fish) that explode clairvoyantly. "Almost every single water effect in the movie was done practically," Houston says. "We didn't actually blow up the fish—that was digital effects. They just disintegrate as blood spurts from pores in their skin."

Push was filmed almost entirely on location in Hong Kong with a small amount of studio work. The exotic locale presented a few challenges of its own: "We had to be careful about involving any kind of technology that wasn't easily available, like motion control and that kind of thing. We did bring in bluescreens and some special lights from the U.S., but otherwise pretty much all the equipment, at least as much as possible, was all sourced locally."

For Houston, the greatest hurdle was bringing to an action adventure spectacle like *Push* the fx sensibility of *The World's Fastest Indian*. "That would be my ideal film," Houston states, "and we tried to take the same approach here. We always tried to turn the effects way down. They're there, but very low-key and subtle." ■

Summit Entertainment's *Push* opens wide in U.S. theaters on February 6.



Force Fields: Kent Houston and his vfx team used Inferno to create the atmospheric disruptions signaling the telekinesis by digitally warping the characters' environment and adding refraction and light energy.

"We worked very hard to create a very subtle effect to give the sense of a lot of power traveling through the air. The original tests we had done made it clear to us what Paul McGuigan [the director] would not like, and eventually we found a nice collection of delicate tricks available on our Infernos that combine very slight image warping and time shifting with hints of refraction and light energy."

—Ken Houston, vfx supervisor, *Push*

along with the disturbing visual of the paranormal event being presaged by the dilation of the pupil past the cornea and sclera of the eye. But exactly what those effects would look like remained something of a mystery. "We had a vague idea of what the effect might involve, but we hadn't actually locked it down at the time of shooting," Houston says. "But once we had rough cuts of the film, we managed to narrow the effects down very quickly and Paul seemed delighted with it."

The pupil dilation was a fairly simple digital trick that demanded careful timing and design to make it seem sinister

traveling through the air," Houston adds. "The original tests we had done made it clear to us what Paul would not like, and eventually we found a nice collection of delicate tricks available on our Infernos that combine very slight image warping and time shifting with hints of refraction and light energy."

Another cool job was visualizing what remote viewing—the clairvoyant process of seeing an event happening far away—might look like. "It's nothing too fancy—It's what you might see happening in somebody's mind when they try to concentrate their focus when they're remote viewing an environ-

The 2009 Anicomm Awards

Animag praises and honors the best animated, most original, funniest and all-around most brilliant commercials of the past year!

It's a generally accepted truth that without animation, the world of TV commercials would be a dreary place haunted by B-list actors, erectile malfunction scenarios and nasty political messages. As in previous years, we were delighted to catch all these inspired commercials which helped us chase away the primetime demons like seasoned exorcists. Our hats off to the geniuses who came up with the ideas and the fine artists who brought them to animated life in terrific 2D or super CG!!

First Place/Tie: "Get It On" for Durex

Next time an annoying balloon animal clown bugs you on the streets, ask him to make some of the sexually uninhibited, energetic



and super-squeaky freaks which star in Superfad's rude and hilarious spot about Durex condoms. Although the ad depicts three

balloon beasts doing the nasty in all kinds of positions, the CG animation is super-clean. This one really squeaked its way into our twisted little hearts in a big way.

Created by Superfad; agency: Fitzgerald & Co.; creative director: Robert Rugan; art director: Andrew Stubbs Johnston; director of animation: Michael Wharton; CG animation: Dave Thomlison

First Place/Tie: "Coffee Shop" for Cox Comm.

The brilliant minds at L.A.-based DUCK Studios have done it again. In their sweet spot created for Cox Cable Communications, we see



loveable little CG-animated dudes interacting with regular live-action people in a coffeeshop. Directors Lane Nakamura and Jan Chen used Maya,

After Effects and Shake to create their little Japanese-influenced Digi guys, which seem to have done the impossible: They actually make us feel good about a greedy corporate cable company!

Created by DUCK; directors: Lane Nakamura, Jan Chen; exec producer: Mark Medernach; producer: Dan Ridgers; animators: Dony Permedi, Eric Molina, Dave Vander Pol

Second Place: "Firefly" for CareerBuilder.com

A happy, singing firefly, who could be the long-lost cousin of Jiminy Cricket, tells a miserable office worker to keep wishing for a new job. The poor little guy has a rude awakening when a huge spider swallows him whole! The spot's sharp comic timing and the seamless blending of live action with animation reminded us of Disney's recent fairy tale spoof, *Enchanted*.



Created by ka-chew!; agency: Wieden+Kennedy; director: Suthon Petchsuwan; animation director: Elliot M. Bour; CG supervisor: Matt Rosenfeld; vfx supervisor/CG specialist: Lochlon Johnston; animation senior producer: Michaela

Zerbib; ka-chew!'s exec producer and creative director: John Andrews

Third Place: "Rabbit" for Comcast

This super-slick CG-animated spot by Down Under wonders Animal Logic really pushes the limits of what you can create digitally for a brief TV spot. To illustrate Internet provider Comcast's slogan "Making fast, faster," the AL animators build a supersonic bunny by genetically breeding it with a panther, adding killer turbines and shaving off its fur



and letting it loose in various lighting conditions and atmospherics such as dust, dirt and wind. The results are the kind of mind-blowing visuals we usually see in gazillion-dollar summer blockbusters. We'd give anything to

see a race between this super-CG rabbit/panther hybrid and Warner Bros.' classic Road Runner!

Created by Animal Logic; creative director: Bruce Carter; director: Noam Murro; vfx producer: Nerissa Kavanaugh; art directors: Ben Walsh, Michael Halford; lead compositor: Nicholas Ponzoni

Honorable Mention: "Giant Monster" for BC Dairy Foundation

Last fall, the BC Dairy Foundation got a big break when New York's expert animation house Curious Pictures delivered their spiffy stop-motion milk campaign. In the ad, a ferocious-looking Godzilla-type monster runs out of steam/fire while he's trying hard to wreak some havoc in a big city. We love the way the toy soldiers mock the fallen monster ... and how the whole thing ties in with the Must Drink More Milk campaign. Not surprisingly, the Curious team got a big Annie nod last month for all their exquisite efforts.

Produced by Curious Pictures; agency: DDB Canada; Vancouver CCO: Alan Russell; creative directors: Dean Lee, Cosmo Campbell; Curious Pictures director: Abe Spear; executive producer: Mary Knox; head of production: John Cline



FIGHT *for* YOUR RIGHTS!

AUTHORIZATION I. A. T. S. E. & M. P. M. O.*

I, _____, (_____) _____
(Please print your name) (Your home telephone)

of _____
(Please print your home address, city, zip)

(Please print your job classification [animator, layout, etc.]) (Your Social Security number)

authorize IATSE & MPMO* to represent me in collective bargaining and to negotiate and conclude all agreements with my employer, _____

(Name of your employer)
regarding the terms and conditions of my employment. If the union obtains an agreement with my employer, I understand that I am free to negotiate more desirable terms on an individual basis. I understand that when the majority of employees authorize union representation, recognition from my employer may be obtained without an election.

X _____
(Please sign here) (Today's date)

Received by: _____

*International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Machine Operators of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO

With This!

ARE YOU SICK AND TIRED OF BEING ABUSED BY YOUR NON-UNION EMPLOYER? FED UP WITH WORKING OVERTIME WITHOUT PAY? THE MEANS TO SAVE YOUR CAREER IS ON THIS PAGE. FILL OUT THE ABOVE CARD AND MAIL IT TO: M.P.S.C. LOCAL 839, 4729 LANKERSHIM BLVD., NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA 91602. IT'S YOUR FUTURE!

CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE AT <http://www.mpsc839.org/mpsc839>

GDC

09

learn
network
inspire

www.GDConf.com



Game Developers Conference®

March 23-27, 2009 | Moscone Center, San Francisco

Early Bird Ends Thursday, February 12, 2009

Register now and save up to 30% on conference passes

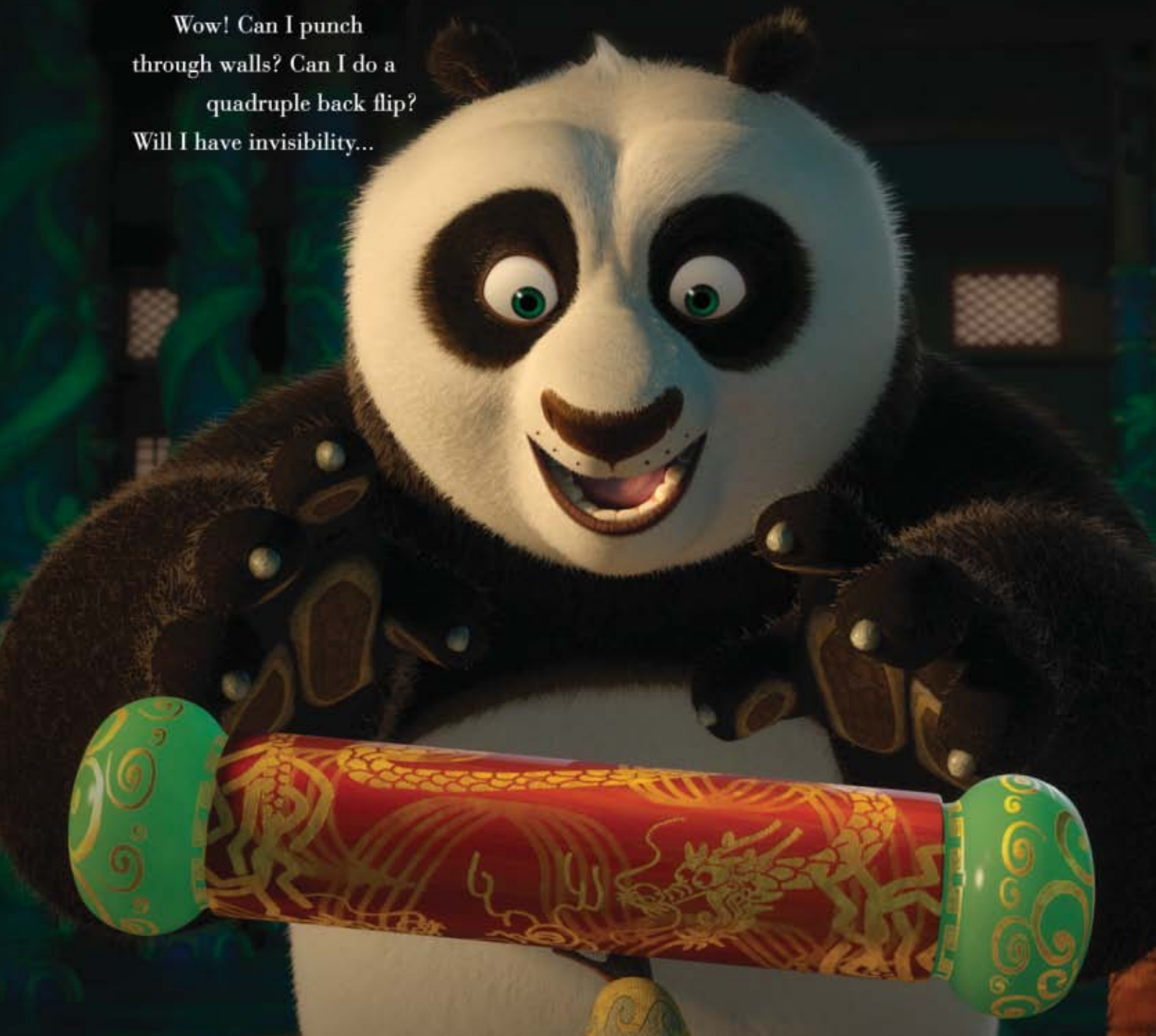
Visit GDConf.com for the latest sessions, keynotes, and news

THINK
SERVICES
a division of UNITED BUSINESS MEDIA LLC

“The animation is
DAZZLING,
so lovingly detailed you can
make out individual hairs on the titular beastie,
and full of bright Chinese images.”

– Kyle Smith, *New York Post*

Wow! Can I punch
through walls? Can I do a
quadruple back flip?
Will I have invisibility...





DREAMWORKS
**KUNG FU
PANDA**

17 ANNIE AWARD
NOMINATIONS
— INCLUDING —
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

3 VISUAL EFFECTS SOCIETY
NOMINATIONS

OUTSTANDING ANIMATION
IN AN ANIMATED MOTION PICTURE

EVERYBODY WAS KUNG FU FIGHTING
THE ANIMATION OF KUNG FU PANDA

OUTSTANDING ANIMATED CHARACTER
IN AN ANIMATED MOTION PICTURE

THIS KUNG FU STUFF IS HARD WORK
THE ANIMATION OF PO

OUTSTANDING EFFECTS ANIMATION
IN AN ANIMATED FEATURE MOTION PICTURE

THE SECRET INGREDIENT
VISUAL EFFECTS OF KUNG FU PANDA



DREAMWORKS
ANIMATED FILMS

Kung Fu Panda © & © 2009 DreamWorks Animation LLC. All Rights Reserved.